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**Constructing Occupational Stress
In a Human Service Agency**

by

**Dennis S. Robinson
B.A., University of Western Ontario, 1990**

**A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
Through the Department of Psychology in Partial
Fulfilment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts at the
University of Windsor**

**Windsor, Ontario, Canada
1993**

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ABSTRACT

The present study explored the multiple meanings of occupational stress in a human service agency by using a constructivist approach. It was posited that such an approach could transcend some of the problems that have plagued conventional approaches to stress research, particularly, the difficulty in defining constructs, the compartmentalization of stress, and the isolation of stress research in particular academic traditions. It was argued that even a dynamic, process-oriented approach such as the transactional approach to stress could not surmount these problems, unless posited in a framework other than positivism. During thirteen interviews, the respondents and the researcher created meanings for stress at this particular agency. These meanings included several important themes, such as teamwork, communication, and violence in the workplace. Possible connections between the concepts of control and social interaction and stress were discussed in light of these prominent themes. In addition, the political implications of the themes were also discussed, particularly with respect to power relations and the regulation of employees in the workplace. Limitations and future directions for the present approach were also presented.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Like so many of the triumphs in my life, I was never alone during this one. I'd like to thank a few of the people who were there along the way.

Thanks,

To my committee who had the often arduous task of trying to understand the way I think and write:

Kathryn, my spiritual guide through the sometimes troubled waters of academia.

Charlene who reminded me that even radicals should sometimes use table manners.

Allan who showed me some of the hinge points in postmodern theory.

To my friends at ACL; I hope it helps.

And thanks to my family and friends; you were always more important than this.

P.S. Thanks for typing, Tina.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Stress in the workplace has received increased attention over the past decade. In fact, the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) - U.S. Public Health Service which is composed of members of government, industry, and trade unions has given occupational stress top priority among workplace health and safety issues. NIOSH sponsored a conference in 1990 which was attended by professionals from the areas of psychology, occupational medicine, epidemiology, public health, and business who gathered to finalize a national plan of action to protect the psychological health of workers (Keita & Sauter, 1992). Occupations in the human service field seem to be particularly vulnerable to the impacts of stress. For some time now, practitioners and researchers alike have sought to explain why these occupations might be particularly stressful, but, as yet, have not had much success.

The present exploration of stress amongst human service employees is a modest attempt to look at the problem from a different perspective based upon a framework of assumptions that is atypical for many scientists, the framework of constructivism. First, I will examine some of the persistent problems that have arisen from using the conventional framework of positivism to study stress. I will also discuss

why constructivism is a viable alternative to circumvent these problems. Next, I will present the transactional approach to stress which is one of the most recent attempts to study stress in a dynamic, process-oriented way. I will also discuss why it would be more advantageous to posit the transactional approach within a framework of constructivism to which it may be more well suited, rather than within a positivistic framework.

Because constructivism is an inherently political approach to research, it will also be necessary to examine how politics may be influencing the present research study. Borrowing from Foucauldian analysis, the present study will be positioned within the critical tradition of work psychology. I will examine some of the ways in which work psychology has treated the "subject" of its inquiry and to what end. It is partly through this discussion that the present researcher will attempt to acknowledge the socio-political context of the research. This kind of critique is essential to the present study because socio-political context plays a vital role in producing the questions to be addressed by the research. Moreover, it is within this context that the answers to those questions will be acted upon.

Framing the Problems: Occupational Stress

Stress has reached the arena of popular culture and research has had much to do with that. Stress pervades our lives; we talk about it at work, in regard to our relationships, in reference to a busy day, and when we describe a crisis in our life. It is hard to imagine a time when stress, or at least what we call stress, did not exist. And yet, in practical terms, what is referred to as stress has been labelled this way for only the past few decades. Now that stress has become part of our everyday discussions at the supermarket, in the bank line-up, and at the bowling alley, scientists have been having difficulty developing a model that is dynamic enough to explain exactly what "it" is. Because of its widespread use, stress now has multiple and diverse meanings which make it very difficult to define.

Psychologists, in particular, have spent countless hours examining stress in occupational settings; however, they have had limited success in explaining the phenomenon. There are several reasons for these limitations. First, there seems to be great contrast in operational definitions of stress and stress-related variables. Stress has had a plethora of definitions, ranging from a generalized physiological response (Selye, 1976) to the objective characteristics of a situation (Spielberger, 1976) to emotional exhaustion associated with burnout (Maslach, 1982). Paterson & Neufeld (1989) suggest that stress, like

most complex ideas, has somewhat vague boundaries and, thus, definitions are often arbitrary. Consequently, the amorphous character of stress itself is responsible for much of the confusion in the present literature. In fact, Paterson & Neufeld (1989) indicate that one of the only remaining uses for the term stress is as a chapter heading or the title of a research field. This definitional bedlam has thwarted all attempts at an integrated theory of stress.

The problem of clashing operational definitions has arisen from the tendency of researchers to describe constructs too concretely, as if stress were a 'thing' that any researcher with the proper tools could measure or describe. For example, there has been a tendency for researchers to focus on very specific components of stress, such as the composition of the stressful Type A behaviour pattern, by measuring and describing them in great detail. Hoping that the continuing process of science will uncover the 'true' nature of stress, the same researchers enter a dialectic with other researchers who focus upon other components of stress, for example environmental stressors. Stress is a complex human construct that defies description mainly because it depends upon the dynamic interaction between the individual and his/her environment from moment-to-moment and encounter-to-encounter (Lazarus, 1991). It is for this very reason that stress cannot be captured in any one universal definition or theory; in fact, stress has been

produced from the scientific dialectic.

Another limitation in theories attempting to explain stress has been the tendency to focus upon either situational factors or personality variables. Several researchers have noted similar trends toward the isolation of personality and situational variables (Riley & Zaccaro, 1987; Beehr, 1987; Caplan, 1987). In part, the difficulty of separating the effects of objective environmental stressors from an individual's perception of those stressors is responsible for a great many of the conflicts in stress theory. Even when interactions have been speculated upon, the relationship has been considered static, or at least measured that way (Lazarus, 1991). Lazarus (1991) suggests that almost no attention has been given to the stress process, that is, the transaction that takes place between workers, the environment, coping, and moment-to-moment, encounter-to-encounter changes in stress.

Lastly, the field of occupational stress has developed in parallel to other studies of stress. Lack of interdisciplinary work on stress has limited more integrated approaches to understanding its effects. Social psychology is generally accepted as the birthplace of study of occupational stress (Beehr, 1987). Many of the other theoretical perspectives of stress have been employed only circumspectly within the area of occupational stress. Kahn et al. (1964) framed the dominant tradition in the

occupational stress field by emphasizing role theory in organizations which resulted in the pervasive focus on role ambiguity and role conflict (Beehr, 1987). Research in the tradition of Kahn et al. (1964) led to a development of occupational research that was distinctly independent from the mainstream tradition in the mental health field. Lazarus (1991) suggests that it is simplistic assumptions carried over from social psychology and sociology that emphasize the idea that certain social environments result in dysfunction. He is equally critical of the mental health field, including medicine, clinical psychology, and personality psychology, all of which have asserted the view that stress is the result of a psychopathological personality. I would argue further that each of these traditions has produced its own view of stress as a result of the assumptions each makes about humans and human inquiry, the questions that each seeks to elucidate, and the practices each uses to answer those questions. If one accepts that the assumptions, questions, answers and practices that form research have a specific critical tradition, then one should address how these different research traditions have developed. Specifically, with respect to work psychology, what is it about the study of stress in the context of organizations that has kept it ostensibly separate from other bodies of stress research?

The present study will attempt to address the issues

described above. First, the transactional approach to stress described by Lazarus (1991) will be examined because of its emphasis on a dynamic, interactive view of stress. The focus of this approach is upon the personal meaning of stress, interaction, and process. The stress transaction is posited to be the dynamic interaction between the individual and his/her environment from moment-to-moment and encounter-to-encounter (Lazarus, 1991). However, it will be suggested that the transactional view of stress is more consistent with an alternative paradigm, constructivism, than the paradigm within which it was conceived, positivism. The stress transaction viewed in a constructivist framework would embrace the notion of multiple meanings of stress which are time- and place-dependent, and even paradoxical. Moreover, since constructivism assumes a position which is interactional, it could serve to transcend the compartmentalization of stress.

Because constructivism incorporates the socio-political context into theory, explanations can also be offered as to why different fields of study in stress have remained ostensibly separate. As such, the present study will also examine the manner in which such a context can influence the questions, answers and practices in psychological stress research. Politicizing theory also has broader implications for research for the ways in which stress research (the present study included) takes part in shaping practice and

policy surrounding stress in the workplace.

Explaining Occupational Stress: A Recipe for Confusion

Some of the expressions that seem to best characterize much of the stress literature include such axioms as equivocal, unclear, ill-understood, not generalizable, moderate and inconsistent. In response to such conclusions, many stress researchers call for more integrated theory-based approaches, more concrete empirical evidence for causal links, and more consistent operational definitions of stress and associated constructs. Unfortunately, these recommendations seem to counter the initiative to find models which are increasingly dynamic and complex enough to account for all stress.

Researchers have responded in many ways to the call for a better model of stress that is specific and structured, yet dynamic and complex. Recently, one of those ways has been to use the concept of control as a theme behind which to rally. Sauter, Hurrell, and Cooper (1989) examined the theme of control extensively in stress literature and concluded that the lack of control in the workplace is one of the largest contributors to job strain and its physiological concomitants. Some of the different constructs that have been postulated to account for occupational stress include elements of control: for example, locus of control, role ambiguity, role conflict, participation in decision

making, employee choice, and job autonomy. Like stress, however, it has become evident that understanding control is plagued by a similar diversity in operationalization. Researchers suggest that before an integrated model of stress can be achieved, an understanding of control and how it relates to stress is a must. However, the diversity of meaning of control makes the task of arriving at an understanding of stress and control as difficult as finding an adequate definition of stress.

One of the early approaches to examining control was Rotter's (1966) conceptualization of internal and external loci of control. The dominant trend in the area has been to examine locus of control in relation to work attitudes. Individuals said to have an internal locus of control believe that effort will lead to better performance on the job, and that their efforts will be rewarded (Green, 1989). Individuals described as having an external locus of control believe that things that happen to them at work are dependent on external factors beyond their control (Green, 1989). Some studies indicate that internals also experience less job strain and anxiety than externals (Batlis, 1980; Gemmil & Heisler, 1972; Organ & Greene, 1974). This association is suggested to be the result of the divergent coping responses used by internals and externals. Internals tend to search for reward contingencies in the environment and to select behaviours that will be rewarded; whereas,

externals tend to engage less in active information seeking, processing, and choice-making (Green, 1989).

Another dominant area of interest in the stress literature is the participation of employees in organizational decision-making (PDM). Participation can be forced or voluntary, formal or informal, direct (individual) or indirect (group representation). Participation can also vary in degree from some form of consultation to full decision-making authority (Tannenbaum & Schmidt, 1958; Vroom & Yetton, 1973). Due to the variety of participatory studies and interventions, it has been difficult to reach a consensus regarding its effect on job outcomes. However, Spector (1986) performed a meta-analysis on 88 studies with 101 samples assessing the general effect of participation. In 3 samples, physical symptoms were negatively associated with participation, $r = -.34$ (adjusted). In another 4 samples, emotional distress was also negatively associated with participation, $r = -.18$ (adjusted). Employee mental and physical well-being seems to be moderately associated with higher levels of participation in decision making.

Two other constructs which have dominated the occupational stress literature are role ambiguity and role conflict. Role ambiguity refers to the situation in which an individual is given information about his/her role that is unclear, ambiguous or deficient. The essential characteristic of role conflict is that an individual is

given information about his/her role that is mutually contradictory; in other words, the information leads to an unresolvable paradox (Beehr, 1987). In general, both of these constructs are found to be related to strain which is indicative of their influence as stressors (Beehr, 1987). The study of role ambiguity and role conflict have some associated implications for research. First, there is an assumption that individuals fill roles within an organizational framework. Problems arise when the roles are not clearly defined or information about them is contradictory. The remedy for stress is, thus, to clarify roles (impose clear structure) and create internally consistent roles (eliminate paradox). Another way to ameliorate stress would be to fit employees to jobs on the basis of individual differences in the tolerance for ambiguity (Karasek, 1990).

Interest in the occupational stress literature has also focused upon the relationship of job autonomy and outcomes. Job autonomy is, "...the degree to which [a] job provides substantial freedom, independence, and discretion to the individual in scheduling...work and determining the procedures to be used in carrying it out," (Hackman & Oldman, 1976, p.258). In his study, Spector (1986) found a negative association of autonomy with physical symptoms ($r = -.33$, adjusted), and emotional distress ($r = -.37$, adjusted).

Consequently, it seems evident that researchers have

found some modest support for the role of control in the manifestations of stress; however, once again there are calls for more consistent definitions and their application, more empirical support, and a more integrated model.

Perhaps most critical is the need to delineate the control construct more clearly, to disentangle it from other psychosocial factors, and to elaborate a comprehensive stress model incorporating control (Sauter & Hurrell, 1989, p.xvii).

As to the specific dimensions of control, although some consensus exists, there are still diverse views of typologies of control and debate regarding their operationalization (Sauter & Hurrell, 1989, p.xvii).

Unfortunately, it seems the concept of control has suffered the same fate as that of stress. Because of its popularization and its diverse use, it has essentially become meaningless in any universal sense as a construct. However, researchers remain hopeful that an integrated theory of stress which incorporates a concept of control can be found.

Another area of research that has become popular over the past decade is the study of burnout. It has been associated with occupational stress, particularly in the field of human services. The burnout syndrome has been characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization in dealing with clients, and diminished personal accomplishment

(Maslach & Jackson, 1982). Burnout has been found to correlate with the percentage of time in direct care with clients (Lewiston, Conley & Blessing-Moore, 1981); more difficult client problems (Meadow, 1981), caseload (Maslach & Jackson, 1984b), and low degree of peer support (Maslach & Jackson, 1982). Moreover, interactions with co-workers are suggested to be important sources of job stress and burnout.

It is unclear how social interaction affects burnout (Leiter & Maslach, 1986). Work which examines burnout and interpersonal environment (Leiter & Maslach, 1988), burnout and communication patterns (Leiter, 1988), and burnout and organizational factors (Leiter, 1991) among human service workers seems particularly relevant to this issue and the results of the present study. In their study of 52 nurses and support staff at a small private North Californian hospital, Leiter and Maslach (1988) found that emotional exhaustion was more prevalent among subjects in work environments with more role conflict and unpleasant contacts with supervisors. Depersonalization was higher for subjects who had more emotional exhaustion, more unpleasant contacts with supervisors, and less pleasant contacts with co-workers. Moreover, personal accomplishment was negatively correlated with depersonalization. Leiter & Maslach (1988) suggested that the results could be described in the following sequence: (1) Unpleasant contacts with supervisors lead to emotional exhaustion; (2) emotional exhaustion led

to depersonalization, unless employees had frequent pleasant contacts with their co-workers; (3) and as depersonalization grew, employees' feelings of personal accomplishment lessened, although supportive contact with co-workers could slow this process.

Researchers suggest that the popularization of the concept of burnout is important; however, it has led to a construct that has a wide variety of meanings that make it difficult to understand (Golembiewski & Munzenrider, 1988). The answer once again is posited to be a more integrated theory.

Personality constructs have also been suggested to be related to occupational stress, for example, Type A behaviour (Schultz & Schultz, 1990) and individual differences in Hardiness (Kobasa, 1979). Type A personalities are characterized by an emphasis on competition and a sense of urgency about time. These individuals are suggested to be intensely ambitious, aggressive, hostile, always working, and always in a hurry (Friedman & Rosenman, 1974). Some evidence has also indicated that these individuals are more prone to coronary heart disease than others (Schultz & Schultz, 1990). Kobasa (1979) suggested that some individuals were more resistant to the effects of stress and illness than others. "Hardy" individuals, she suggested, perceived a higher degree of control over their environment. They were more likely to

select problem-focused coping strategies, rather than emotion-focused strategies. It was suggested that problem-focused strategies were more adaptive in stressful situations (Kobasa, Maddi & Kahn, 1982).

All of the above concepts are purported to be interrelated in ways that make thinking about occupational stress mind-boggling. The diversity of constructs posited, their possible connections, and applications would be complex indeed. It is possible that a grand theory of stress that is dynamic and complex enough to capture the process of stress and specific enough to provide integrated and consistent meanings of stress to operationalize has been perpetually out-of-reach. In fact, the whole endeavour to posit such a beast may be illusory. A painfully evident query comes to mind as I write: why, then, do we do it? Maybe researchers should be trying to accomplish something a little less grand and paradoxical.

If we cannot ultimately achieve the monumental goal that we have set for ourselves, the explanation, prediction, and control of all stress, then perhaps more modest goals should be ascribed. At minimum, we should try to address some of the paradoxes that cobblestone the yellow brick road of our inquiry and direct us toward those illusory answers in Emerald City. This is not to suggest that research findings do not tell us anything about issues, problems and concerns that people may experience at work; on the

contrary, such findings are certainly elucidating. The question still remains, does every construct that research posits about occupational stress necessarily have to fit under the banner of one ultimate stress theory? How can they? The confusing and often contradictory findings of research are valuable just as they are. Researchers need to continually remind themselves that they are using constructs to make sense of the world and constructs can only abstract the world, never reveal the truth in it. Perhaps, if researchers consider constructs in their time-and-place dependent context, they can be useful. Theorists need to always respect that constructs are products of social discourse used to refer to the happenings of our lives. A construct such as stress must necessarily have a multitude of diverse meanings and representations because the term stress is used in a multitude of contexts by a wide variety of people. The only common meaning is that which can be agreed upon for the most part, by scientists and lay people alike, but it is still an abstraction. The meaning of stress is dependent upon the different ways that people use it to describe the people, objects and events in their lives. Moreover, its meaning is always changing; thus, once we have adequately explained stress in one context, it has perhaps already transformed into something else.

Given the illusory nature of stress, why do we study it? As long as we attach significance to the construct,

albeit diverse and illusory, it is a phenomenon worth study because it manifests itself in people's lives. Because employees refer to stress having real impacts upon their lives and jobs, it is a worthwhile focus of study. Perhaps it is not so much a question of why we should study stress, but of what are the goals of our study, and what are the effects of the process of achieving those goals?

Problems of Framework

It will be one of the major tenets of the present study that many of the problems that plague stress research are a result of an uncritically examined paradigmatic framework. That is, the problems that stress theorists have with contradictory operational definitions, the compartmentalization of stress, and the lack of cross-disciplinary collaboration are the result of a lack of critical philosophical examination of the paradigms within which stress research is produced. The notion of paradigms was brought to attention largely by the work of T. Kuhn (1962) who questioned some of the basic tenets of scientific disciplines. Ironically, in defining a paradigm, it has been suggested that he was not successful. Masterman (1970) asserted that Kuhn used the term himself in no fewer than 21 different ways. Guba (1990) argues that leaving the term in "problematic limbo" is actually intellectually useful because, "it is then possible to reshape it as our

understanding of its many implications improves" (p.17). Guba (1990) defines the term paradigm in its most generic sense as, "a basic set of beliefs that guides action, whether of the everyday garden variety or action taken in connection with a disciplined inquiry" (p.17), which is the definition that the present study will accept.

The study of occupational stress, in particular, has had its foundations in the philosophical tenets of positivism. It is a consequence of the uncritical examination of the value of the "sacred" tenets in positivism that has led many theorists into unresolvable dilemmas in their attempts to model stress. It will be posited that by reconsidering some of these tenets in the context of alternative paradigms some of the problems of conventional stress research may be transcended. Some alternatives that have been posited by theorists to replace positivism in psychology are postpositivism, constructivism, and critical science. It is not the focus here to elucidate these alternative paradigms to positivism; however, the unfamiliar reader will find a more thorough discussion of the similarities and differences between the above-mentioned paradigms in Guba and Lincoln (1989).

In the present study, it is suggested that constructivism and poststructuralism, in particular, offer alternatives that may serve to empower human inquiry in the field of occupational stress. Constructivism is useful to

the present exploration because of its focus upon the multiple, socially-constructed meanings of the "object" of inquiry. This utility is largely as a result of its relativist position with respect to ontological queries (What is the nature of reality?) and its interactive/subjectivist position with respect to epistemological queries (What is the relationship between the knower and the known?) (Guba, 1990). Thus, for the "problem" of operationalizing stress, constructivism may offer an alternative that suggests multiple, time-and-place dependent, and possibly paradoxical meanings for stress are far from being a problem, but, in fact, necessary. Lazarus (1991), a proponent of the transactional approach to stress, suggests that one of the central concepts necessary for a dynamic process-oriented model of stress is personal meaning. However, as I will argue in the next section, because of the paradigm under which the transactional approach was conceived (cognitive psychology), it is bound by the tenets of positivism and, therefore, cannot adequately account for the multiplicity of meaning that seems to characterize the stress literature.

The interactionist/subjectivist epistemological position of constructivism also seems to be more congruent with a interactionist view of dichotomies. The constructivist problematizes dichotomies, for example, the distinction between the inquirer and the inquired into (the

subject and the object) because they are human abstractions. Such a position has implications for other dichotomies, such as problematizing the distinction between individual and environmental determinants of stress. Thus, constructivism may be able to avoid the compartmentalization of stress that has been evident in much of the previous research.

Constructivism abandons any claim to objectivity in research and, therefore, must be viewed as a political and value-laden position. It is here that poststructuralism seems to be useful with respect to the present inquiry, and in particular, Foucauldian poststructuralism. Because of the poststructuralist emphasis upon the ways in which the subject of human inquiry has been produced in history through social practice, it is well suited for examining the ways in which stress research has been produced with respect to critical academic traditions and their respective social practices. Moreover, this critical examination can offer insight into the ways by which stress research within a particular paradigmatic framework continues to produce stress research as it does. Perhaps then, researchers can more readily determine why some fields of stress research are or are not reconcilable and in what ways, and why they might attempt to privilege their position over others. At minimum, researchers should be more aware of the social practices of their discipline and the ways in which they have produced the results of their research.

Lazarus: Away from Strict Positivism?

Stress research is a field ripe for a shift in focus. Already we begin to see the cracks in the positivist paradigm of stress. The cracks are manifested in those areas of theory that are problematic, for example, the unyielding struggle to derive an increasingly accurate yet comprehensive definition of stress, the thing, the relationship, the dynamic complex interaction.

Ironically, every attempt to accomplish this task only adds to the definitional nightmare in stress theory. Another example of a paradigm crack is the problem of determining where stress in the person begins and stress from the environment ends, an exercise for which there seems to be no resolution. A last example pointing to paradigm problems in stress research would be the systematic blinding of research fields to others with little attempt made to draw upon the experience of other researchers and practitioners within their contexts.

An approach recently proposed by Lazarus (1966; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, 1987) has been offered as a solution to some of the problems encountered by stress researchers and has become quite popular in recent examinations of stress, but I question whether this approach has been able to escape some of the problems of positivistic inquiry. Often referred to as the transactional approach, it is marked as an advance in stress theory mainly because of its focus upon the

dynamic person-environment interaction and its emphasis upon appraisal (personal meaning) of stress. I will examine the ways in which this approach may move away from positivism and the ways in which it may be still constrained by it.

The transactional approach to conceptualizing stress uses the interaction between the individual and the stressful situation as its unit of analysis (Lazarus, 1991). Not only is this approach interactional, but it is also transactional suggesting that the stressful setting and the individual's reaction to that setting are always changing and can affect each other. In other words, there is a dynamic reciprocal interaction between the objective stressors in the environment and the individual's appraisal of and response to them.

Because of the emphasis upon transaction and process, Lazarus (1991), asserts that research should focus upon the ways in which individuals appraise their respective environments.

Since personal agendas vary from person to person, and even within the person from moment to moment, and since the environment is often quite complex and ambiguous, we attend selectively to what is happening, and evaluate it in diverse ways. This results in great variation in the appraisals people make in the same environmental context. Appraisal is usually not fixed, but we are constantly trying to evaluate what is

happening in a way that is both realistic and also allows us to see the conditions of our lives in as favorable way as possible. A sound theory of psychological stress must be capable of helping us understand the variations in the ways individuals appraise adaptational transactions with their environments (Lazarus, 1991, p.5).

Lazarus (1991) suggests that there are two basic kinds of appraisal: primary appraisal which is concerned with the degree of personal stake in an encounter, and secondary appraisal which is concerned with the available coping options for dealing with threat, harm, or challenge.

Another important focus for Lazarus (1991) is the coping responses that individuals employ. He defines coping as, "the cognitive and behavioral efforts a person makes to manage the demands that tax or exceed his or her personal resources" (p.5). Because the environment is in constant flux, coping must be viewed as a relationship of process between demands and personal resources (Lazarus, 1991). He also asserts that coping affects stress in two basic ways. "Problem-focused coping consists of efforts to alter the actual relationship [between demands and resources], as when we seek information about what needs to be done and change either our own behavior or take action in the environment" (Lazarus, 1991, p.5). "Emotion-focused coping consists of efforts to regulate the emotional distress caused by harm or

threat" (Lazarus, 1991, p.5).

Lazarus (1991) makes the argument that research about stress with respect to the workplace has primarily focused upon the ways in which job conditions create stress for employees in general. The shift away from purely focusing upon job conditions to a concern with the goodness of person-environment fit Lazarus (1991) regards as positive, but he suggests that the person-environment fit has been characterized as static. Further, he argues that stress would be better conceptualized in an individual way because it is the individual upon which psychological stress can have its most damaging effects. Commenting upon the focus of research on job conditions and, likewise, types of vulnerable personalities in the workplace, Lazarus (1991) suggests that, " although this kind of knowledge is valuable, it misses the central point that the sources of stress are always, to some extent, individual, as are the ways people cope with stress" (p.7).

Brief and George (1991) criticized Lazarus' suggestion that it is not that useful to try to identify adverse work conditions which affect most workers. They disagreed that description and understanding of stress requires a focus upon individual patterns. Brief and George (1991) contended that a focus upon intraindividual processes is justified because certain job conditions do affect the well-being of most workers. They went on to suggest that, in fact, it is

the duty of organizational researchers to try to identify these conditions and ways in which they can be alleviated. Brief and George (1991) reframed their perspective in terms of a question: "What sorts of job conditions do most people, upon exposure, cognitively appraise as threatening or harmful and have difficulty coping with to the extent that their well-being in life is impaired?" (p.17).

Harris (1991) suggested that Lazarus' model does not incorporate any concept of the organization in stress transactions. He asserted that a theory of stress must account for the profound ways in which the organization can influence its employees. Moreover, Harris (1991) also suggested that the person-environment transaction as the unit of analysis poses considerable difficulty for measurement. "It can be argued that occupational stress researchers know something of the people and something of environments, but have little knowledge of the dynamic interaction of people and environments" (Harris, 1991, p.26).

Although researchers see the transactional approach to be an important step in representing stress in the workplace, it also raises serious concerns. Lazarus' approach can be conceptualized as an important shift away from positivistic mechanistic psychology (Barone, 1991). The transactional approach seems to shift away from objectivity in that it focuses upon the subjective experience of

individuals; thus, like constructivism, it is the meaning that people attach to objects and events that is of importance to the researcher. The approach also focuses upon the dynamic interaction between person and environment in an attempt to avoid some of the reductionistic and mechanistic problems of positivism, for example focusing too heavily upon either the environment or the person. However, methodologically, the transactional approach still maintains an empirical view. That is, the emphasis is still upon trying to objectively measure the dynamic interaction of "objective" stressors and "subjective" perception of them with snapshots of the interaction as derived from numerical indices. Through the collection of many snapshots, it is assumed that the whole of the process can be represented through hypotheses and generalizations. However, the approach does not recognize the researcher's subjectivity in producing the research results and the problems associated in a researcher attempting to distance him/herself from the "object" of inquiry.

Thus, methodologically, Lazarus (1991) seems to counterindicate his own dynamic and context-dependent view of stress. Lazarus (1991) suggested that stress must be viewed as a process. "Psychological state changes over time and across diverse encounters. Person-environment relationships...are not constant over time, or from one work task...to another" (Lazarus, 1991,p.3). If stress is viewed

as a process, it cannot be evaluated unless using research designs that are intraindividual, as well as, interindividual or normative (Lazarus, 1991). However, Harris (1991) asserts that the adoption of the transactional approach suggests a reduced emphasis on nomothetic approaches, in favour of more idiographic ones. Empirical designs usually employ interaction terms that are formed from a mathematical computation (usually multiplication). These designs attempt to partition out the variance due to an interaction (as in ANOVA) or use repeated measures. However, in each of these cases, "the interaction, represented as a combined variable, partition variance, or observed over time, is static as opposed to dynamic" (Harris, 1991, p.27). As Harris (1991) pointed out,

While Lazarus makes an important observation concerning the dynamics of the interaction of people and environments, the question which naturally arises is how is the interaction of the person and environment measured, analyzed, and tested? (p.27)

Harris (1991) suggested that Lazarus' use of The Ways of Coping scale and its eight factor solution may not be generalizable to an occupational setting, and may not even be consistent with the interactional model proposed, in that it is nomothetic and not idiographic. If the transactional approach implies a form of methodology that is more idiographic in nature than nomothetic it may represent a

major shift away from positivism; however, Lazarus himself does not use an idiographic methodology. The present study will posit that a constructivist methodology is more consistent with the transactional approach.

Because of an ontological position that accepts the existence of objective reality, efforts to model the way in which stress "really" exists in nature and predict its outcomes are still the goals of research. However, if one accepts that Lazarus' approach is phenomenological, emphasizing the individual's subjective perception of stress, the attempt to model reality with an objectivist epistemological position seems counterintuitive. Recall that epistemological questions are interested in the nature of the relationship between the inquirer and the inquired into. Lazarus (1991) poses a model of stress derived from a theory which incorporates personal meanings of stress, yet he defines and measures stress for all of his research subjects through the same model. In other words, he views personal meaning in a positivistic manner. This is problematic because it refers back to what Guba and Lincoln (1989) describe as the arbitrary separation of observational and theoretical language. Those categories that are part of a theory are abstractions of the theoretician, yet when they are measured and analyzed they are referred to as products of nature. It would seem that the transactional approach needs to address the ways in which the researcher's

definition of "personal meaning" is a product of the model and not necessarily of the research participants.

A last issue regarding the transactional model is directed toward the distinction between deductive and inductive analysis. Guba and Lincoln (1985) described deductive analysis as that which begins with theoretically-based hypotheses and confirms or falsifies them by reference to a body of empirical data. Inductive analysis begins with the data itself from which theoretical categories and relational propositions are arrived at through reasoning. An inductive approach to research would seem more congruent with the view that Lazarus holds of stress, than would a deductive one. Lazarus (1991) suggests that analysis should be based upon concepts of transaction, process, and personal meaning; however, he employs deductive analysis to study these concepts by providing a model of stress, and hypotheses regarding it, then testing them. An inductive approach to analysis would seem more conducive to studying the context-specific, subjective meaning of stress and process. Inductive analysis also seems more appropriate for addressing the emergent meanings of stress that come from data (produced by the participants), rather than inquiry which imposes a theoretical meaning upon it. That is, by imposing a model of stress upon employees, can one actually find out the ways in which employees view stress at their workplace? If the transactional approach were based upon

inductive analysis it would be consistent with constructivist inquiry.

In summary, the transactional approach seems to emphasize many of the elements of constructivist inquiry, including the focus upon interaction, process and meaning. However, the theory associated with the approach seems to be constrained by some of the epistemological, ontological, and methodological assumptions. Moreover, some authors have raised concerns about the socio-political implications of the theory with respect to the organizational setting. Certainly, the transactional approach is politically consistent with respect to some of the traditional themes of work psychology, particularly by focusing on the individual. It has been suggested that, by focusing on the individual, theories in work psychology result in the regulation of workers en masse in the workplace (Hollway, 1991). Critics of the transactional approach suggest that by focusing upon the individual, it neglects systemic, organizational influences (Brief & George, 1990). For example, this approach targets the individual and his/her perception of stress; it directly addresses an individual's coping style and, thus, could be accused of focusing the responsibility of stress upon the individual, instead of organizational influences. Some of the movements in work psychology will be examined in a later section to demonstrate how focusing upon the individual in the workplace serves to regulate the

workforce.

Using Lazarus as a Springboard

The transactional approach to stress offers some viable alternatives for applied research in the occupational setting; however, because of its grounding in the tenets of positivism, it remains constrained. Posited within an alternative framework, the transactional approach may be more consistent with some of its major tenets including the focus upon personal meaning, process, and interaction.

Adopting a position that draws upon the tenets of constructivism allows the researcher to accept more comfortably the multiple, diverse and sometimes contradictory meanings of stress because it embraces the notion that there is no one definition or meaning for a construct that can encompass "objective" reality. Such a position is derived from the notion that attempting to "discover" reality is impossible since researchers can never "objectively" know it. What is called objective is always derived from the subjective, no matter how much a researcher attempts to distance him/herself from the object of inquiry through methodology. Within a constructivist framework, the transactional approach would be able to provide for meanings of stress that remain individually and contextually dependent without imposing higher-order theoretical meanings derived from a model upon them. Moreover, within a

constructivist framework, meanings for stress that were contradictory, both individually and theoretically, could co-exist.

A constructivist approach is also consistent with the way in which the transactional approach to stress is based upon interaction and process. The transactional approach focuses upon the dynamic interaction between the worker and his/her environment from moment-to-moment and person-to-person. Similarly, constructivism would contend that the static dichotomization of the subjective experience of stress and the objective environment is problematic. However, constructivism would also posit that the dichotomy between the inquirer and the inquired into is problematic and, thus, challenge the type of conventional empirical methodology that is used in stress research. Such a position seems to be consistent with the view that the transactional approach is based upon a more inductive inquiry and that any associated methodology should be more idiographic in nature.

Another aspect to be considered is the political nature of constructivism. Because constructivism collapses the distinction between the inquirer and the inquired into, research must be viewed as a political act and the political aspects of research must be accounted for within its theories. For example, the focus upon the individual in the transactional approach to stress cannot be viewed as apolitical. This focus needs to be examined in light of its

historical and social context. In this respect some aspects of poststructuralism may be useful for critiquing a transactional approach to stress because of the focus upon historical and social context, language, and power relations.

Poststructuralism focuses upon the manner in which power relations shape and privilege knowledge (Lather, 1990). By accepting some of the tenets of poststructuralism, relativism is made postfoundational in the sense that there exist, "partial, locatable, critical knowledges" (Haraway, 1988, p,584). In part, the goal of poststructuralism is attempting to locate those partial critical knowledges in their historical and political contexts. Poststructuralism allows the researcher to frame the social and historical context of the research through examining power relations and social practices, including those within the research assumptions themselves. Given that power relations influence research and theory, a researcher needs to examine in ways in which this influence manifests itself, especially, if he/she is planning to advocate for those positions which are considered underprivileged in his her research. A researcher who does not address the historical and social influences of power may be blindly contributing to their reproduction. Thus, beyond simply creating space for alternative constructions of the object of inquiry, a researcher should also be aware of the ways in which

constructions are privileged over others, and the historical practices that have produced such power relations. In doing this, the researcher ensures that the research process does not unwittingly contribute to keeping some constructions privileged over others.

Poststructuralist critiques of applied research in occupational settings, then, have various implications for the application of a transactional approach to stress in the present study. A researcher cannot simply apply the transactional approach to stress to a new context like a working organization without considering the socio-political implications of its framework. Moreover, the study of stress in organizations is positioned within a discourse which has been producing characteristic research within a long-standing critical tradition, work psychology. The social practices of such a tradition must be recognized as part of the any "new" theoretical position on the study of stress in organizations. Adopting a constructivist approach which includes some poststructuralist critique, in particular upon the ways in which social practices have historically produced research, allows the stress researcher to incorporate the politics of stress within the research inquiry itself. Moreover, the researcher is not distanced from the research data and, thus, must be viewed as producing research from a privileged position within a discourse which has associated socio-political implications.

In short, the transactional approach must be recognized as a political and value-laden position, instead of a transcendental theory of stress.

In summary, a transactional approach posited within a constructivist framework allows the researcher to embrace multiple, context-dependent, and sometimes paradoxical meanings of stress. It allows the researcher to more fully employ an interactionist/subjectivist position, since it posits a congruent ontological and epistemological positions. Moreover, by employing a poststructuralist critique, the transactional approach can be recognized as political and value-laden and, thus, is required to account for its impact upon the lives of employees.

In the next sections, I would like to discuss some of the socio-political issues that may come to influence the present study. Particularly, the transactional approach when applied to occupational setting must be seen as an heir to the tradition of work psychology and its politics.

Politics of Theory

Occupational stress may be seen as a product of an intellectual tradition in work psychology and as produced out of past social practices within that tradition. Hollway (1991) suggests that the field of work psychology is uncritical of the social practices and histories that have produced it and continue to reproduce it. As such, it is

important to elucidate the procedures of this tradition that have examined humans as objects and produced them within a system of knowledge. Any theoretical position on stress is inherently a political one, as well. We need to know how studying occupational stress within a certain theoretical framework can contribute to the way employees are viewed at work. The theoretical frameworks that guide occupational stress research have a tradition in work psychology and are political motivated.

Hollway (1991) suggests that the systemic myopia of work psychology is the result of the area's reliance on the virtues of positivism and its uncritical identification with behavioral sciences which in turn identifies with natural sciences. It is essential for the work psychologist to examine how "the subject" gets produced and reproduced within the social and historical context of the organization. Hollway (1991) makes the argument that work psychology helps to produce discourses and practices in work. Work psychology achieves its practices by influencing management practice. Its power lies in that it reflects back, in a systematic, formal, and apparently scientific way, to management's preoccupation with the regulation of the workplace. Whether these practices may or may not contribute to employee well-being becomes a secondary issue (Hollway, 1991). However, Hollway (1991) suggests that there exist multiple and competing discourses which contribute to

people's positioning within the dominant discourses in an organization. Work psychology is in the position to contribute to these alternatives. One condition is that it must recognize the assumptions which have produced its practices and discourse and have been tied to the goal of regulation through management.

Hollway (1991) in her book, Work Psychology and Organizational Behaviour: Managing the Individual at Work, examines themes and discourses that have been produced by work psychology. She suggests that throughout the eighty year history of work psychology, there has been a transition from overt forms of regulation to covert forms; this is particularly evident in the transition from the scientific management model to a human relations approach. Hollway (1991) also suggests that the emergent focus upon organizational development, change, and culture is also a product of these predeceasing discourses. Despite the varying views of work psychology and its models, Hollway (1991) makes the argument that what they all have in common is targeting and regulating individuals at work.

Hollway (1991) suggests that in the early twentieth century, during the dawn of industrialization, the object of the regulation of work was the shop-floor worker. Workers in factories were attached to a production process according to formal divisions of labour. According to Foucault, there was a growth in new modes of domination in the Western World,

specifically shifting from traditional authoritative modes to disciplinary modes (Hollway, 1991). Disciplinary modes of regulative organization grew in barracks, schools, lunatic asylums, and prisons. Regulative organization was characterized in factories by coercion; workers in the factories were treated as labour, hands performing jobs. However, centralized groups of prisoners, schoolchildren, lunatics, and workers were placed in the unique position of being able to self-organize against the prevailing forces of domination simply by being grouped together and, thus, resistance grew (Hollway, 1991).

The early part of this century was marked by the prevalence of scientific management with its emphasis upon maximizing the output of each man and machine (Hollway, 1991). Scientific management provided a strategy to manage workers en masse by focusing on individuals. Hoxie (1915) asserted that trade unions claimed that scientific management had refused to deal with workers except as individuals. This set the stage for industrial psychology with its focus upon the individual largely because of its usefulness as a political tool to counter the increasing organization of labour into trade unions (Hollway, 1991). In particular, the emergence of the new psychology of individual differences promised a resolution; it allowed for the regulation of groups in large numbers, but it effectively targeted individuals. The goal of psychometric

tests in industry was to fit the worker to a job in which he/she would be effective; tests focused upon the individual, but were effective in regulating the workforce as a whole. However, because of the outcomes of the Hawthorne studies, the human relations movement began to emerge; instead of targeting the individual in terms of performance and ability, it focused upon the thinking, feeling individual (Hollway, 1991). American employers had attempted to deal with a dissatisfied workforce by providing comprehensive welfare provisions within a framework of paternalistic control, for the most part to keep unionism at bay (Hollway, 1991). However, it had not been completely effective and, now, non-authoritative agency was proposed to serve to control and direct those human processes within industrial structures that were not adequately controlled by other agencies of management (Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1970).

The human relations movement was the partly successful attempt to, "enlist the cooperation of workers in the goals of the company without changing its structures or technology" (Hollway, 1991, p.76). It is characterized by its focus upon the psychological and interpersonal levels; some of the key ideas included supervisory training in interpersonal skills and leadership to influence the morale, motivation, attitudes, and feelings of subordinates. During that time, the early 50's, western economies and the

practice of management were based, and still are, upon the drive toward profit, engineered through permanent growth through mass consumption. Human relations' role in this has been to produce a target for work psychology deep within the individual. The central question posed is: "how to create internal commitment in individuals at all levels of the organization, in order to solve problems of regulation and resistance which were seemingly insoluble by the old disciplinary strategies [like scientific management]" (Hollway, 1991, p.153). Through human relations self-discipline has become the goal, not overt discipline.

Hollway (1991) suggests that the human relations approach pervades much organizational research, including research on employee health and safety. With respect to employee health,

history suggests that work psychology has been engaged in an employers' compromise between taking no action and initiating structural changes; a compromise which generates some treatment of symptoms, rather than addressing causes (Hollway, 1991, p.178).

Thompson and M^cHugh (1990) assert that,

Companies have a major stake in promoting a healthier life-style for employees, because of the potential benefits in reduced insurance costs, decrease absenteeism, improved productivity and better morale (p.403).

Psychology has provided theories purporting to predict stress-prone individuals, perhaps offering a useful technique in recruiting and monitoring employees. It has also offered stress-control techniques for employees that operate at a psychological and physiological level and, thus, are not a threat to the control of management (Hollway, 1991).

By depending on levels of analysis that target the individual, even those researchers who perceive the cause of stress problems to lie in the conditions of the organization find it difficult to incorporate this into their analysis and even more difficult to address those conditions in their interventions. Psychological interventions have been popular, not least because they leave structural conditions unchallenged (Hollway, 1991, p.178).

Thompson and M^cHugh (1990) assert that work psychology's main achievement lies in the production of knowledge which attribute the responsibility for stress to the individual, rather than the organization.

The role of the organization in producing unhealthy systems and conditions of work is in danger of being ignored. In its place we get systems reinforcing the self-attribution of stress and anxiety as personal problems to be coped with, rather than structural issues to be contested. (Thompson and M^cHugh, 1990,

p.324)

An Association for Community Living

My involvement with a local Association for Community Living (ACL) began with my initial contact of the agency. ACL is a non-profit, community-based agency which provides support services to individuals who are developmentally challenged. The prime directive of the agency is to encourage participants in its programs towards living in the community. As such, ACL has one main office and many other diverse satellite residential and occupational settings. Approximately 300 employees are involved with the delivery of ACL's programs. The major funding for the agency is provided by the Ministry of Community and Social Services; other funding is provided by many local community-based service clubs and through ACL's fund-raising activities.

I expressed an interest in doing a study regarding occupational stress, mainly because of my previous experience as an employee in similar agencies. I viewed occupational stress as an important area of research because of its seemingly pervasive impact upon many of my co-workers, participants in the programs, and me. As it happened, ACL was interested in doing a project of the same nature. ACL's interest was, in part, the result of recent contract negotiations with the local union in which the

development of an employee assistance plan (EAP) was discussed. Occupational stress was viewed as one of the problems that an EAP could address. As part of the collective agreement, it was agreed that ACL would continue to meet with its union to discuss the implementation of such a program. As a result, ACL was interested in knowing the nature and extent of stress within the organization; specifically, as it might relate to an EAP. From the first encounter, along with my thesis advisor, the Operations Director (ACL), and the Executive Director (ACL), I began to negotiate a research contract which outlined the nature of my relationship to the organization and the research process.

Some of the issues which provide some socio-political context for the research are the recent health and safety legislation from the Ministry of Labour, forthcoming cutbacks to social programs by the Provincial Government, and the discourse surrounding the implementation of independent living for the developmentally disabled. Under the recent legislation, An Act to Amend the Worker's Health and Safety Act (1990), workplaces are now required to have in place a joint committee of management and labour to address health and safety concerns. Complying with legislation, ACL has set up joint health and safety committees in many of its work sites. These committees are overseen by one central joint committee. Where no committee

exists, work sites fall under the supervision of the Central Health and Safety Committee. It was to this committee that the information resulting from the present research was reported. Although the information was presented by the researcher to members of the central joint committee, it was under the direct supervision of the Operations Director at ACL. The general purpose of these health and safety committees is to jointly resolve worker problems/complaints. If the matter cannot be resolved, the Ministry of Labour is contacted to review the issue.

Another issue which has set the socio-political stage for the present research is the recent announcement of cutbacks to social programs by the Provincial Government. According to the Operations Director, ACL is expecting to have its budget cut by 0.8%. No staff lay-offs have been planned for the first fiscal year; however, funding may not be readily available for staff training or an employee assistance plan.

ACL has joined all ACL's in Ontario in adopting a philosophy of independent living and community integration. ACL suggests that this philosophy is reflected in all its policy statements. Since policy statements are important guides as to how employees conduct themselves at work, this philosophy created another socio-political backdrop for the present research. Specifically, the mission statement in ACL's policy manual states that,

[ACL] is an organization of people committed to advocating for and supporting persons who have a developmental handicap to live and fully participate in all aspects of community life. It is the mission of [ACL] to ensure that all persons are fully respected and treated equally as citizens and members of families and community. Each person will be assisted, in accordance with their individual needs to act and have control over their own lives and to accept responsibility for their actions. Services provided shall support individuals on the basis of their own unique needs and abilities. ACL is committed to encouraging [sic] each person's sense of self-worth, confidence, and continuing development.

The Research Process

One concept that is central to a constructivist methodology is the concept of purposive sampling. In a conventional sense, a sample is referred to as a collection of people who have been selected statistically who will serve to represent a wider population and, therefore, permit hypothesis testing and generalization (Hollway, 1989). However, this is not the pursuit of a constructivist paradigm, so sampling takes on a different meaning. Purposive sampling may include sampling extreme cases, typical cases, critical cases, politically important or

sensitive cases, maximum variation sampling, or convenience sampling (Patton, 1980 in Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Hollway (1989) refers to theoretical sampling in opposition to statistical sampling as being based upon understanding similarities and differences; trying to address the complex conditions of people and their conduct without providing evidence that whole groups of people do the same thing. The present study, like Guba and Lincoln (1989), focused upon maximum variation sampling because it provided the broadest scope of information (the most diverse constructions). Since the inquiry process centred around the negotiation of constructs, the more diverse the constructions that were negotiated the more productive the research process was presumed to be.

Constructivist inquiry attempts to move toward a joint construction of the research object which is negotiated from all of the individual realities that are represented in the theoretical sample. The most important aspect of such a process is that the negotiated construction is grounded in the individual constructions of respondents (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Over time, as successive respondents comment and critique the constructions developed, a joint construction can begin to emerge about which consensus can begin (or not begin) to form. However, almost by necessity, as the joint construction emerges, it becomes less and less representative of the individual constructions of the

sample. Drawing upon the work of Glaser and Strauss (1967), Guba and Lincoln (1989) suggest that research must always be questioning whether or not the joint construction fits and works. The construction fits when the categories and terms of the construction account well for the data and information that the construction allegedly encompasses. The construction works when it provides a level of understanding that is acceptable and credible to the respondents and to the inquirer. The present discussion of constructivist methodology is at best a basic overview that will allow the reader to connect some of the philosophical tenets of the paradigm with its methodology. For a more detailed discussion of constructivist methodology, please see Guba and Lincoln (1989).

Guba & Lincoln (1985) discuss the notion of transferability from one research context to another. If one adopts a position that the grand theory (set of generalizations) of science is an illusion, then one is left with the set of particulars within one's field of experience of which one tries to make sense (notice the emphasis upon inductive logic). Like generalization, transferability still attempts to focus upon the similarity between research contexts; however, the burden of proof of that similarity lies with the person who is attempting to apply research findings from another context to his/her own context. Thus, the original researcher does not make generalizations that

apply to other research contexts because he/she usually has only tacit knowledge of that other context. The case report, then, should provide its readers with enough information to allow them to feel familiar with the inquiry site in all its details.

CHAPTER II

METHOD

Stakeholders and Participants

One of the first steps in the present study was to identify stakeholders who also represent those individuals who compose the purposive sample. Stakeholders are those individuals or groups of individuals who are either agents, beneficiaries, or victims of an evaluand. The evaluand is the research focus, or what is being evaluated; in the case of Guba and Lincoln (1989) this would most likely be a program. In the present study, the evaluand was occupational stress or, more directly, it was occupational stress with respect to the development of an Employee Assistance Plan. During contracting, the stakeholders identified included:

- Front-line Employees - including full-time, part-time, and substitute employees who are members of the local Public Employees Union.
- Unit Managers (vocational and residential)
- Program Participants (clients, residents, supported participants)
- Non Front-line Employees (administrative staff etc.)
- Volunteers
- Members of the Health and Safety Committee
- Executive Director
- Operations Director
- Researchers

Instruments

Instruments employed in the present study included a preliminary interview protocol (see Appendix A), a

microcassette tape recorder, and a transcriber.

The interview protocol was designed to be as unstructured as possible. The initial questions were derived from issues which at the outset of the study seemed to be important. That is, through preliminary discussions with some of the organizational members, these issues were repeatedly focused upon. They were meant only as reference points for the participants; however, it was not required that they be adhered to. As data collection and analysis proceeded, later questions were formed by the information that emerged from earlier interviews and, thus, questions were added or deleted as warranted. The interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed according to the procedure to be described in the following section.

Data Collection

It is difficult to separate the process of data collection and analysis in the inquiry process suggested by Guba & Lincoln (1985) since both are happening concurrently. This is unlike more conventional inquiry in which specific hypotheses are posited, the numerical data are collected and then analyzed. The data of a constructivist inquiry (including observational and interview field notes, documents and records) are processed in a way that is characteristic of traditional ethnographic inquiry (see Guba & Lincoln's, 1981, discussion of Goetz & LeCompte (1981)).

The present study relied mainly upon qualitative information collected from open-ended interviews and organizational documents.

Guba and Lincoln (1989) refer to their method as the Hermeneutic Dialectic Process of Natural Inquiry. It is hermeneutic because it is an attempt to interpret and it is dialectic because it represents a comparison and contrast of divergent views with the goal of achieving a higher level synthesis of all of them. Data collection in such an inquiry begins with an original interview respondent (R_1) who is selected for some salient and explicated reason, for example, s/he is a gatekeeper for an organization, or in an obvious position of authority. Usually, such a participant is in the position to greatly influence the study in terms of limiting access to the organization or information; in this sense, they have a pass/do not pass veto over the process of inquiry similar to that of a gatekeeper. In the present study, a Co-Chair of the Health and Safety Committee at ACL was selected as the first respondent because of her position and power to influence the study. R_1 was engaged in an unstructured, open-ended interview to determine an initial construction of the area being investigated. Specifically, R_1 was asked to describe and comment upon the research issues in personal terms. R_1 was then asked to nominate another respondent (R_2) who R_1 believed had a much different view of the research issues than s/he did. R_1 's

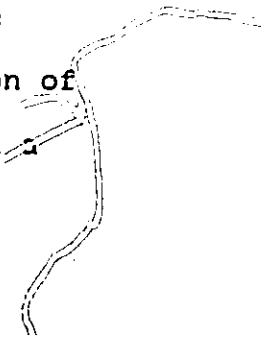
central themes, concepts, ideas, and values were extracted from a typed verbatim transcript of the interview and analyzed by the researcher into an initial construction² (C_1). The process of this analysis is referred to as the constant comparative method, which is largely based upon the work of Glaser and Strauss (1967), is described in more detail in the next section. R_2 was interviewed through the same interview process as R_1 , but was also given the opportunity to comment upon C_1 , as presented orally by the interviewer. As constructions began to form they, in turn, provided information to direct questioning in subsequent interviews. R_2 then nominated R_3 and a second analysis results in C_2 which was be presented to R_3 during his/her interview (see Appendix B for an example). This process continued until the ultimate joint construction of the research issues was created. This criteria is usually met when information becomes redundant from interview to interview, or there are 2 or more irreconcilable constructions of the research issues.

Data Analysis

Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously. With each new construction added to the theoretical sample, a joint construction that was representative of the entire sample was created. With each addition of a new respondent, the constant comparative analysis took place (based upon

Glaser & Strauss, 1967, expanded upon by Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Analysis progressed in three stages: comparison incidents applicable to categories, integration categories and their properties, and delimitation of a construction. During the first stage, the text derived from data collection was broken down into units. In the most simplistic manner, this means that the investigator attempted to demarcate units of information based upon a "feels right" or "looks right" basis drawing upon his/her tacit knowledge of the research site. Guba & Lincoln (1981) suggest, more specifically, that a unit has two characteristics. A unit should be a heuristic, that is, be aimed at some understanding or action. In addition, it should be the smallest piece of information that can stand by itself, that is, it must be interpretable without the addition of any other information other than a broad understanding of the context in which the inquiry is taking place.

During the second stage of analysis, categories were created as the investigator organized all of the units in a meaningful way³. More specifically, the investigator attempted to group units into provisional categories that seemed to relate to the same content. The investigator developed formal written rules that served to describe category properties and used these to justify inclusion of each unit of information. Category rules also provided a



basis for checks of replicability and served to render the category set internally consistent.

During the third stage of analysis, the investigator attempted to delimit the joint construction. First, delimiting occurs at the level of construction because fewer and fewer modifications were required as more and more data were processed. In particular, data collected later was specifically aimed at providing closure to the construction(s); here, the investigator began to realize both parsimony and scope of his formulation. Second, the original list of categories was reduced because of increasingly better articulation and integration. As well, categories became saturated, that is, defined to the point that adding exemplars was not useful. For a more thorough discussion of the constant comparative method of analysis see Guba and Lincoln (1981), and Glaser and Strauss (1967).

The present data analysis differed from the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in a number of ways based upon the time and resource constraints of the present research project. In the first stage, coded units (see Appendix B) were created by the researcher and placed in computer-generated categories, instead of grouping cards together, as Glaser & Strauss (1967) suggested. In the second stage, the formal rules of each category were actually short descriptions of the computer-generated

categories (see Appendix B). In the third stage, a formal delimited "construction" was not described in a concrete formal manner after each interview, for example, in the form of a miniature formally-written theory. Instead, the researcher attempted to use his intuitive knowledge of the research context, in association with the transcript data created by previous interviews, to derive questions that led into subsequent interviews. Through this process, the researcher further delimited the research categories and attempted to delimit the joint construction of occupational stress at ACL through interview notes, tacit knowledge of the research setting, and several revisions to the interview protocol (see Appendix C for an example). The formal delimitation of the joint construction occurred during the process of writing the findings section in this document.

The Case Report

The end result of the data collection and analysis was the synthesis of the categories and themes derived to account for the theoretical sample into a written case report. The case report provided a rich description of the themes and supported them with exemplars from the data. Thick descriptions and exemplars should provide readers with the information necessary to make judgements about the transferability.

The case report also communicated the multiple and

possibly contradictory realities that are not usually presented in a traditional scientific report. Moreover, it described the interactions between the respondents and the investigator, the values of the investigator and the context, and the many other mutual shapings that may have influenced the research results (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). The case report served as the basis for both the Findings Section in the present study and a technical report to ACL.

CHAPTER III

SALIENT FINDINGS⁴

Research Participants

In an ideally executed method, all of the stakeholders mentioned above would have represented the collection of participants in this study. However, due to limited time and resources, data collection was restricted to front-line employees, union representatives, a member of the Central Health and Safety Committee, upper level management, and a Unit Manager. The process of maximum variation sampling successfully resulted in a diverse group of individuals in the theoretical sample. Data were collected from 13 individuals, including 10 females and 3 males. Number of years employed with ACL ranged from 1 to 13. The sample included 4 Program Coordinators, 1 Full-time Sleepover Support Worker, 1 Full-time Vocational Support Worker, 2 Supported Independent Living Workers, 1 Unit Manager, 2 upper level managers, 1 Part-time Support Worker, and 1 Substitute Support Worker. And lastly, 2 employees were with vocational services while 11 were with residential services. Two respondents were also representatives for the local branch of the employees' union. Lastly, all of the respondents were caucasian; thus, the sample was not diverse with respect to race. Two individuals refused to participate, including one manager and one full-time support

worker.

Throughout the findings section, the most salient grouping features employed were job description, gender, unit manager, upper level manager, and union representative. However, because summaries of the present findings were also submitted to the Central Health and Safety Committee at ACL, some variations in grouping features were required to guarantee confidentiality to the respondents. In cases where mentioning a grouping feature was considered to place an individual respondent at risk of being identified, the researcher simply referred to the individual as a respondent or used only those descriptive aspects of the respondent that did not put them at risk of being identified.

Job descriptions used to group respondents varied around the type of support staff members offered to clients. Support Workers at any level (Full-time, Part-time, or Substitute) were responsible for supporting clients in their daily routines and activities, whether it be in a residential or vocational setting. Full-time employees received full-time hours and benefits. Part-time employees received 35 hours or less per week in regularly scheduled shifts, but received no benefits. Substitute employees received 35 hours or less per week, but shifts are received on an on-call basis, and there were no benefits. In the position of Program Coordinator, employees fulfilled many of the same roles as regular Full-time Support Workers.

However, Program Coordinators were also expected to keep the work site organized, take responsibility for some administration, and communicate with management. Their duties included scheduling, payroll, and other administrative work. Supported Independent Living Workers supported clients a little differently. These workers usually had a caseload of about 9 clients who were living independently in apartments. Supported Independent Living Workers worked out of a drop-in centre that was always accessible to their clients and often made visits to their clients in order to offer support. Sleepover Support Workers (either Full-time, Part-time, or Substitute) spent the night in residential group homes. Their shift was split between 3 hours spent awake with regular duties and 7 hours spent asleep. Unit Managers were responsible for the administration of multiple settings, usually 4 group homes or 2 vocational sites. They also reported directly to the Operations Director. Central Office included the Unit Managers, upper level managers, and other administrative support staff.

Overview

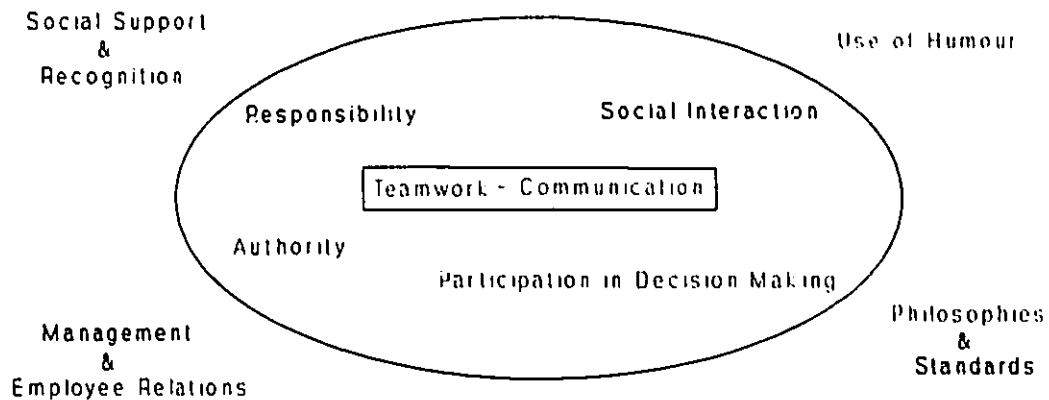
Many different viewpoints were presented throughout the process of data collection; however, since there was an attempt made in the present methodology to build consensus in regard to information constructed from the interviews and

organizational documents, some framework was required to present the diversity of views represented in the present sample. Issues upon which there was some consensus between interviews were teamwork, communication, and violence in the workplace. These issues were often addressed spontaneously by the respondents without direct probes from the researcher. Consequently, issues surrounding teamwork, communication, and violence became the most salient features of occupational stress at ACL. This section will attempt to frame both the consensus and the diversity within these themes and related ones, as well as represent themes upon which there was much less emphasis placed by respondents and the researcher.

Teamwork and communication were regarded as extremely important in determining the degree to which front-line employees experienced stress. Moreover, as data collection progressed, issues arose which directly related to teamwork including responsibility, authority, participation in decision making, and social interaction. Tertiary issues that impacted on the nature and implementation of teamwork also affected stress. These included management and employee relations, social support and recognition, implementation of philosophies and standards, and the use of humour. All of these issues can be found graphically depicted in the framework presented in Figure 1.

Violence in the workplace also received a great deal of

Figure 1. Issues Related to Teamwork and Stress at ACL



attention from the respondents. Further issues addressed by some of the respondents included employee qualities, job types, job settings, family issues, and women in the workplace. These issues did not seem to be as salient to respondents as were the issues of teamwork, communication, and violence, however.

Lastly, issues arose surrounding what ACL as an organization could do about the negative impact of stress on its front-line employees. These included discussions of an Employee Assistance Plan, education, and relief. In most cases, these issues were addressed through direct questioning by the researcher. With the exception of relief, none of the respondents addressed these issues spontaneously.

The following sections will address each of the above-mentioned issues in turn, beginning with those issues

related to teamwork.

Teamwork

Teamwork and communication were mentioned spontaneously and often as being the most important issues that bore upon whether an employee experienced stress. Respondents varied as to whom they considered to be part of their team. Most considered unit managers, front-line staff members, and their families to be part of their team. Some individuals included central office staff and clients as part of the team and some did not. Respondents felt that good teamwork led to things operating more smoothly and, therefore, reduced stress.

There was a great deal of agreement as to the essence of what constituted good teamwork. Most respondents suggested that there was a certain seamlessness to working with a team where team members knew their responsibilities and picked up where their fellow team members left off, but team members were also willing to pick up the slack for team members who for some reason temporarily could not perform their duties.

The manner in which responsibility affected teamwork varied somewhat between respondents. One Full-time Support Worker suggested that at ACL there was often an attitude of "it's the next person's job" that consistently undermined good teamwork. It was suggested that there was a certain

sense of dependency on fellow team members. One Program Coordinator suggested there was no way of doing her job by herself; she needed her fellow team members. There was also a sense of solidarity in a team. For example, a Full-time Support Worker suggested good team members did not allow a fellow team member to consistently shirk their responsibilities because it had an impact on the team. At the same time, team members covered for one another so that mistakes could be avoided. Many respondents identified co-employees who were not "pulling their weight" as one of the biggest stressors at work.

If you feel like you're doing everything and other staff are coming in...doing their job[s] and leaving...they don't really care what's gone on yesterday or any other day...they're not coming to you and saying, 'Is there any extra things you need us to do?'...I am really quite frustrated...because I feel like [saying], 'You're getting paid just as much as I am and I'm trying to make your life as easy as possible.' - Residential Program Coordinator -

A few respondents asserted that a team needed to work toward the same goals. One Supported Independent Living Worker suggested that many times there was not a recognition of this basic characteristic, but that a crisis could quickly remind a team of it. Respondents also suggested that feeling comfortable sharing and contributing ideas was a necessary

element of teamwork and often misused authority or faulty communication could hamper this.

Communication was suggested to be a vital part of teamwork and a major issue in the experience of front-line stress. Communication was important for problem solving, sharing ideas, and support. Moreover, communication had to be open, in that no information should be withheld from team members and team members should be at liberty to express their personal view of issues. The expression of diverse opinions and viewpoints was considered to be an extraordinary strength of open communication in both personal and work-related problems. One Supported Independent Living Worker suggested that fellow team members should never "close their ears" to one another, even in relation to personal problems. Another quality of good communication was that problems were addressed by the group, and never by an individual. Thus, responsibility and control were distributed among everyone, and everyone felt valuable.

It's amazing that one...little thing. I'll see it done one way and then someone else will come up and see it another and so on. If you get all those three ideas together that's pretty good. Everybody learns differently and we see things differently...It's a lot more valuable, than just one person. - Full-time

Vocational Support Worker -

Respondents also suggested that staff members who were in a

position of authority over other staff could set the tone for the team. In some cases, it was suggested that open communication could facilitate teamwork, but in other cases communication was perceived to be not open, to the detriment of teamwork. However, in almost every case, effective teamwork was at least partly attributed to communication with the individual who was the manager or supervisor. It was suggested to be critical that a person in authority did not constrain the qualities of good teamwork. Particularly, recall that employees felt that all team members should be considered equally contributing members with no one member having all the responsibility or control. At the same time, authority figures were suggested to be important when teamwork was failing because of their role as leaders. (Authority will be elaborated upon in a later section.)

Another important aspect of teamwork suggested by many of the respondents was that team members needed to know each other in some personal way. A Substitute Support Worker suggested that a person could not be part of a team unless one knew one's teammates. Without spending time together and socializing, it was asserted that there could be little unity within a team and that good relationships would not develop. One Program Coordinator expressed enjoyment at being able to "get to know" the other members of their team and having fun with them. Respondents suggested that being able to socialize with team members made for better teamwork

and less disputes. One of the Unit Managers and a few Program Coordinators also talked about their responsibility in making sure that their staff were "getting along" and making the staff feel as though they belonged to the team. In fact, one Program Coordinator made sure that the clients organized birthday parties for the staff because she felt it contributed to team-building.

Many respondents suggested that trust and respect among team members were also important for good teamwork. For example, team members acknowledging tasks done by fellow team members was suggested to be important. One Program Coordinator was convinced that saying, "Thanks a lot. I really appreciate that," made a big difference in the quality of teamwork.

Responsibility

An issue that was often related to teamwork and stress was the issue of responsibility. In particular, respondents indicated that there was something about being part of a team that diffused responsibility. Feeling totally responsible for everything made staff feel stress because they were made personally accountable for possible mistakes. If something went wrong, it would be an individual who suffered for the mistake, and not the team. One upper manager suggested that staff often did not go that extra mile at work because of the fear that they would be totally

responsible and the fear that, if there was a mistake, they would "hang" for it. Being able to delegate or successfully divide responsibilities between team members was regarded as a positive way to handle the weight of responsibility. Teams alleviated stress because responsibility was diffused across the group. However, one Full-time Support Worker suggested that there was a tendency at ACL to make individuals, rather than the team, accountable for problems which added to front-line stress. For example, it was suggested by one respondent that Program Coordinators were often targeted when problems arose because they were responsible for many of the daily operations at the work site.

Some respondents mentioned that the responsibility associated with being on the front-line was particularly stressful because employees were responsible for human beings. Respondents talked about the responsibility for their clients being similar to the responsibility that a parent might feel for their child, and staff and clients in the group home being like "family". The major difference from a "real family" was that front-line employees had much less control over their ward than do most parents. One Program Coordinator talked about the impact on her of being responsible for the lives of four people. She felt that it was her responsibility to make sure that everything in their lives was running smoothly. In fact, so great was her emotional attachment to her clients that she would feel

personally responsible [guilty], if her clients did something wrong.

Some respondents talked about being stressed because they did not have enough responsibilities and others had too many. One Program Coordinator was frustrated because she felt that her manager did not give her enough responsibility. In contrast, a Supported Independent Living Worker asserted that there were so many new challenges added to her "do list" everyday that some days she just felt like banging her head against the wall.

Communication

Another issue related to teamwork mentioned in every interview was communication. In fact, almost all of the respondents suggested that communication was the key to understanding stress on the job. The type of communication between staff members, and staff members and management was an important feature of the front-line stress experience. In particular, most respondents regarded open communication between all levels of ACL to be desirable; whereas, gossiping at ACL was not. It was especially important that communication between staff members and their supervisors and managers, and upper management be open.

a) Type of Communication:

Open communication led to good teamwork and reduced

stress. For staff who needed to solve problems or who were upset, open communication in many cases provided the means to alleviate stress. Open communication could alleviate stress by de-escalating stressful situations before they became a problem. One Substitute Support Worker said that, unfortunately, it usually took a crisis in order to invoke open communication. Respondents suggested that open communication was hard work. It was also communication that was face-to-face, open-minded, compromising, and respectful of the opinions of others. Moreover, open communication did not involve "finger-pointing".

Respondents seemed to suggest that open communication should always exist between front-line employees, and between front-line employees and managers. A Supported Independent Living Worker said that open communication should be constrained by only one limit, that being the exclusion of information that is harmful to individuals. Many respondents agreed that withholding information from team members was unwarranted and led to breakdowns in communication. Very little information was regarded as too private or confidential. At minimum, it was critical to communicate information related to the execution of the employee's job. Respondents referred to situations where they had not received important information, or where important information had been miscommunicated, as being particularly stressful. For example, one Support Worker

believed that she was put at risk of sexual assault because she had not received important information about her client.

Some respondents suggested that when communication was not open, it only added to the "rumour mill" which served to increase everyone's stress. A Substitute Support Worker said that when professional recourses for communication were not available to staff that gossip became an alternative route. He said that issues should be confronted in a professional way, but there was a talent to knowing what issues to confront and when to do it.

[It] depends what [co-employees] offend you about. If they discuss something like your competence, then 'yes' discuss it. If you hate Ross Perot and they love Ross, 'Man, Ross Perot is what America has needed for years!", then what's the point? Confront what must be

confronted. - Residential Substitute Support Worker -

Respondents indicated that open communication took place between people who trusted and respected one another.

Respondents felt that sometimes they could not trust co-workers or managers. Gossiping served to undermine trust and respect which were suggested by respondents to be important components of open communication. A Full-time Support Worker said that once trust was gone, so was teamwork. One Program Coordinator said that gossip was often individualized and vindictive and it was produced by those passing harsh judgement on others. Another Program Coordinator said that

having open communication was wonderful, as long as you could say things without the fear that they might come back to "haunt" you. Some respondents suggested that they often did not speak their minds because they were afraid of the outcomes, including being scoffed at, entering into a confrontation, being attacked, or looking stupid.

To be able to communicate...[you need] to talk and listen, without barking back. If there is a problem just come out and say it, without being afraid that that person is going to attack you. A lot of times I

just don't say anything. - Vocational Support Worker -

One point made by many of the respondents was that ACL was an organization with a ripe grapevine. That is, many respondents indicated that wide-spread organizational gossiping was a problem at ACL and that it could really upset them. Some respondents indicated that, although there was a lot of gossip throughout ACL, central office was also a place in which gossip took place. Respondents often felt that, although staff and management alike gossiped, management should take the initiative to end gossiping at central office and be role models for the rest of the organization.

Any time you walk into central office you hear managers talking about employees...I always leave that office saying, 'I can't believe how unprofessional they are!' Front-line workers are just as bad because [they] get

together with a group of people and everyone...nit-picks...their managers. So, it goes both ways, but I think management should be the first ones to stop [gossiping and] be front-line role models. - Program Coordinator -

Gossiping made dealing with staff problems much more difficult according to one manager, especially if the problem had to be dealt with at central office.

Some respondents suggested that "gossiping" was not necessarily always bad because sometimes it was necessary just to "bitch" in order to "get things off your chest." Other respondents agreed that it was important to be able to have "beefing sessions" because it alleviated stress.

[I] like sitting down...[with] all [the] staff...[and] management and having a beef session. One of the places I worked at years ago...had one of those meetings where everyone just got to air out everything. You left that meeting feeling like...a load [was] lifted off you. - Program Coordinator -

Many of the respondents denied that they were involved in gossiping. They claimed they heard what was being gossiped about, but did not contribute to it. However, one Substitute Support Worker said that gossiping was natural and fine, as long as it did not hurt anybody professionally.

Everybody gossips. I gossip. I love to hear the dirt. I love to dish the dirt. You know what I mean? If it goes

on about me, as long as it's exotic, I think, 'Great!'
As long as you are not going on about something that
could damage [someone] professionally. - Substitute
Support Worker -

b) Communication and Authority:

Many of the respondents talked about the kind of communication that occurs between front-line staff and managers or program coordinators. Good communication between staff members and their managers, and program coordinators was essential for reducing the impact of stress. In fact, one respondent said that her manager was the source of her stress. Another respondent indicated that poor communication with her manager often created crises for her at work. The relationship between managers, program coordinator and front-line staff will be further elaborated upon in the discussion of authority that follows.

Many respondents discussed the quality of communication between front-line staff and upper management, and upper management and union. Some respondents suggested that communication between upper management and front-line staff, and upper management and union could set the tone for communication throughout ACL. In this regard, respondents from upper management suggested that there was an "open-door" policy at central office; whereas, most of the other respondents disagreed. Respondents felt that upper

management was often not approachable and was sometimes secretive about information.

Some respondents suggested that it was because of a defensive tension between union and upper management that communication with upper management was not open. Many respondents felt that often they perceived resistance from upper managers long before they could address any issues to them. For example, one respondent said that she felt patronized by upper management. Another respondent felt as though she was "cut off at the knees" before she could even begin to address an issue with upper management. A Program Coordinator asserted that once staff members were been labelled by managers as "bitchers or gossipers", they were "black-balled" and, therefore, were not listened to by management. In any case, many respondents felt that communication with upper management and front-line staff, and upper management and union had improved in the recent history of ACL.

Communication with managers, and with central office was often related to the employees participating in management decisions. Respondents felt that through open communication, front-line staff members could be included in decisions. One respondent indicated that even if the rationale behind decisions made by management was communicated to her, it would be enough to reduce stress.

Respondent: [Communication] between upper management

and front-line staff...creates a lot of stress. We're going through the budget cuts and everything else, and if we don't know what's going on, then we're thinking, 'Are our jobs at risk?'...The other thing is restructuring. We have no clue what's going on when they're restructuring...I respect management a great deal...,but ...they [will] say [things like], 'Vocational will be going in a different direction.'...Well, where are we going?...

Interviewer: What would you want from them?

Respondent: Well, if they don't want to include us in the changes that's fine. It's nice to be included because we have some good ideas...We know what's going on here. So, if you're not going to include us in the changes, then at least keep us informed.

Authority

The relationships between staff members who were in positions of authority and staff members who were not seemed to play a vital role in the experience of front-line stress. In particular, front-line staff members who could

communicate openly and directly with their managers and program coordinators suggested that they experienced far less stress. Good managers were described as compromising, supportive, and accessible. One Full-time Support Worker described how hard it was to work with a Program Coordinator who had a "my way is the only way" attitude. Another respondent described her manager's controlling and authoritative attitude as being the exclusive cause of her stress. Because of the Program Coordinator, one respondent asserted none of her co-employees felt like helping out or contributing input because they already had many of her responsibilities passed off to them. A Full-time Support Worker said that having a manager who was inaccessible created stress for her. She found it stressful that her manager was consistently unavailable or being interrupted, or that her manager sometimes prioritized other duties over speaking with her, even in a crisis. Sometimes being accessible created problems for management. For example, a Unit Manager said she was often bothered by front-line staff members constantly calling her at home. She didn't mind being available for legitimate problems, but felt that many times the problems could have been handled without her.

Some managers were too quick to criticize, instead of recognizing the humanity of their staff, according to one Unit Manager. For example, if a staff member admitted becoming angry when dealing with a client, some managers

would immediately criticize the staff member for acting inappropriately, instead of first trying to be supportive. A Substitute Support Worker said that it made work much more difficult when he knew people were watching him critically because it "handcuffed" him. He felt that he had to guard his words and actions because he would be criticized for them.

Respondents suggested that managers were particularly important because of their roles as leaders, although there was a difference as to the particulars of that role. One Full-time Support Worker said that managers should be available for support or when decisions required higher authority, but if a home was running smoothly they should leave it alone. However, another Full-time Support Worker said that the manager played a key role in the workplace:


[My manager's] like a pilot. The ship only goes where the pilot goes...She made me...happy because the ship was going the right way...You could talk to her at any time. She would tell you what you needed to know, not what you wanted to know...[and] she'd give you all the feedback you want[ed] -Full-time Support Worker -

One Part-time Support Worker said that sometimes the authority of a manager was needed to resolve a problem because employees were not in the position to criticize another staff member at the same level. One union representative said that managers needed to recognize the

vital role they play with the staff. They should consider each person and each situation carefully and individually, recognizing that everyone is different and everyone is human.

Participation in Decision Making

Several respondents described being frustrated or panicking if they did not know what was going on because of a lack information or miscommunication. An issue that related to communication was the participation of staff members in decisions made by management. Respondents seemed to indicate that there would be much less stress if they had input into decisions made by upper management or were at least kept informed about those decisions. One Part-time Support Worker felt like she was fighting a losing battle because she could not get upper management to listen to her. She suggested that upper management did not listen to her because she was a part-time employee and she had no power. Some respondents believed that employees who did not get any response from management with regard to an issue would become bitter. For example, one Program Coordinator asserted that she did not feel like advocating for the clients any more because management had not listened to her in the past. In fact, she suggested that decisions made by management about clients were often motivated by convenience and expediency, and did not include clients or staff in the



deliberations.

Being included in decisions that affected one's job was considered to be highly valuable by most respondents. For example, a Substitute Support Worker suggested that everyone should have input into the philosophies of care at ACL, not just management. He said that this kind of input was valuable to front-line employees, but it was not evident at ACL. One Program Coordinator recalled being told by management that front-line staff and the clients were the most important focus of ACL and that central office staff were just "fillers", there for no reason other than to support front-line staff. This being the case, she hoped that management seriously considered front-line input when they made decisions. Some respondents suggested that central office staff did not include front-line staff members in decisions because they were more concerned with administrative outcomes than the clients.

One upper manager said that committees were an excellent way of getting employees involved in making decisions. In particular, the Health and Safety Committees included employees in decisions because they were composed of representatives from both management and union. This manager felt that committees allowed employees to see broader issues in the context of the whole organization and see problems with a "different set of eyes." For example, employees may not have been aware of the financial impacts

on the ACL. However, by sitting on a committee, employees become familiar with these issues and others to which they may not otherwise have been exposed. Moreover, this manager suggested that committee-work helped to increase problem-solving skills that employees could take back to their jobs. In addition, joint committees also served to open lines of communication between management and union. However, a union representative said that ACL had not really actively encouraged employees to become involved with committees and that often the committees did not even exist on which front-line staff could sit. In fact, this respondent asserted that the first joint committee to exist in the agency, the Central Health and Safety Committee, was initiated by the union. Upper Management would not even meet with the union representatives until the appropriate proportion of members for the committee had been decided.

Social Interaction

Respondents suggested that the quality of their social relationships at work also impacted upon their experience of stress. Respondents mainly referred to their relationships with co-employees or managers; however, some also discussed the impact of their relationship with the clients and the clients' families. In addition, many of the respondents talked about the importance of staff members having the opportunity to socialize with one another, often in

reference to building team unity.

a) Friends or Foes

Several respondents described conflicts between staff members as one of the most stressful aspects of their job. Some referred to such conflicts as, "clashing personalities." These conflicts were considered stressful by respondents for various reasons. One Part-time Support Worker asserted that staff conflicts were stressful because often the clients got involved and the conflicts became aggravated. One Full-time Support Worker said that clashes between staff often came from a fear of losing one's job which led to a lack of trust and "back-stabbing." One Substitute Support Worker described how different styles of interacting with the clients caused him conflict with other staff members. He said that he had a good rapport with his clients and interactions with them sometimes included a "fuzzy barrage of four-letter words"; whereas, another staff member with whom he had continual conflicts was "all politeness and rules." A Program Coordinator asserted that crises were produced at work when people did not have respect for one another, staff members and clients alike. She described how frustrating it was for her not to feel respected, even by the clients.

Many respondents suggested that relationships with co-employees could also be one of the most rewarding aspects of

their job. One Program Coordinator said that she derived a great deal of pleasure from knowing other staff members and going out with them socially. Another Program Coordinator asserted that the staff at her place of work were not just co-employees, but also were her friends. She also said that she had stayed in her job because of the positive feedback she had received from ACL staff and the families of the clients, and not because of her salary. In many cases, staff members could offer a great deal of support to fellow employees. A Unit Manager said that many of the staff members did not realize the kind of support that was available to them from other staff members simply by asking for it.

b) The Human Connection

Some respondents described what they felt was the basis for good working relationships. One Supported Independent Living Worker suggested that there had to be a human connection between staff members. There sometimes was not a recognition of co-employees as whole people. Similarly, a Substitute Support Worker said that there were conflicts between many staff members because the staff members were not viewed as whole people. Instead, co-employees often only saw the working part of people.

[Our] model of human[s] is [work-oriented]

and...society is having us look at only half of

ourselves to the point that people say,

'What do you do?'

'Oh, I work for [the Association of] Community Living.'

We've replaced what we do with [who we are] almost. That's why there is such a job stress problem because [people] are Home Support Worker[s] or Vocational Counsellor[s]...not an inspiring painter or a person who loves reading...[or] someone who takes dance classes on Monday nights. We are not seeing the other aspects of the human as important, yet we're trying to bring [them] out in our clients. How can we? [We're only]...half human. - Substitute Support Worker

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The same Substitute Support Worker also said that staff should respect that there were many social relationships at work, but that each relationship was individual and should be dealt with as such.

c) The Clients

Many respondents suggested that one of the most positive aspects of their job was the clients. Several respondents talked about the kind of intense emotional attachment that they had developed for their clients. One Program Coordinator said that her clients were like her family. Moreover, she said that the clients viewed her as family too. In fact, she repeatedly referred to her role in

the group home being like that of a parent.

Some respondents talked about how the clients could also frustrate them. Several aspects of this frustration were discussed. Some respondents described seeing changes in their clients as positive, but if those changes were too slow, then they became frustrated. One Full-time Support Worker said that clients could make her feel uncomfortable, particularly when they were repetitious or long-winded. A Program Coordinator asserted that sometimes she got frustrated by clients who were ungrateful for the extra work that she had done trying to get them out into the community. Sometimes because staff members felt like family with clients, they had difficulty being objective. One Supported Independent Living Worker felt that being emotionally involved with her clients made her job much more intense. One Program Coordinator talked about feeling guilty when her clients failed at something.

d) Getting Together

Many respondents felt that social gatherings organized for staff were great ideas because they allowed for staff members to get to know each other and, therefore, led to better teamwork. One Supported Independent Living Worker said that such events were valuable because staff members were able to see co-employees "let their hair down", in other words, to see the non-working side of their fellow

teammates. A Substitute Support Worker asserted that social gatherings built unity among staff members and that this unity served to help the staff deal with crises better as a team.

Some respondents suggested that social events were great because they were an opportunity for staff to talk about issues at work in a casual atmosphere. A Part-time Support Worker said that getting together outside of work to "talk shop" could be a great stress reliever, as long as there was no discussion directed at individuals. Another Full-time Sleepover Support Worker described how she and some co-employees got together every couple of weeks to have a potluck and how valuable that was to her.

Despite indicating the importance of social events, most respondents also suggested that organization-wide social gatherings in the past were flops because no one came. One Supported Independent Living Worker said that organizing social events was difficult because there were such diverse interests among the staff members. One respondent suggested that social events flop because they were not organized through a team effort. Instead, events were organized by a few people and, therefore, only a few people were personally invested and interested in them. Practical constraints and family responsibilities also kept employees from attending. For example, a Program Coordinator felt that many staff did not attend social functions because

of the cost associated with them. One Vocational Support Worker complained that she could not go to social events because she had to be at home for her children and that babysitters were just too expensive.

There was a great deal of diversity between respondents when they suggested how social events should be organized. Some respondents suggested that more localized social events (e.g. within a group home) would be more successful because they involved more natural social groups. A union representative suggested that social events might be more feasible in group homes, if management would provide some modest funding for them. However, other respondents said that it was also valuable to meet employees outside one's immediate work setting. A few respondents said that the types of social event were not in essence what was important, but that staff members had an opportunity to socialize, period. One Program Coordinator said that if social events were combined with business, such as in educational seminars or in luncheon meetings, then more people would attend seminars, meetings, and social events. A Part-time Support Worker asserted that the main problem with getting people to attend unit meetings was that there was not anything in it for them. She suggested that unit meetings solely focus on the clients or house issues, but rarely was there an opportunity for staff members to just socialize or talk about staff issues. She asserted that even

if staff members got together to talk about what was bothering them, they might reflect upon how they treated their co-workers and clients.

Other Issues Related to Teamwork

Management and Employee Relations

Another issue related to both communication and participation in decision making was that of relations between upper management and union, and between upper management and front-line employees. Some respondents suggested that defensive attitudes between management and union at ACL contributed to stress throughout the organization because they set tones for communication in the agency. Respondents suggested that having an "us against them" attitude often interferes with open communication. In fact, both an upper level manager and union representative described being forced by the opposite group to use a lawyer to communicate during negotiations where he/she never had to before. One Supported Independent Living Worker suggested that the grievance process itself had an us/them quality that led to poor communication between management and employees.

Several respondents suggested that upper management was not open with front-line staff. A number of respondents felt that management did not really want open communication. Many

times, according to one Substitute Support Worker, management was deaf to front-line staff until there was a crisis. Another Part-time Support Worker believed that upper management was blind to a lot of things happening in the field because they only received information from unit managers who selectively filtered information. A Part-time Support Worker described taking issues to upper management and then giving up on them because she did not get any response. In fact, she asserted that management was of no use to her because they had consistently failed her in the past. One Program Coordinator said management should be more attentive to staff because staff had a better understanding of clients' needs than upper management did. One union representative suggested that one of the biggest sources of burnout at ACL was the repeated occurrence of problems that employees had previously tried to address with management that had not been corrected. She described being frustrated watching things happen that she could do nothing about and feeling like ACL was working against her.

Respondents suggested that if upper management facilitated the front-line staff the way the staff facilitated the clients, staff would be much healthier. A Supported Independent Living Worker said that everyone needs to be needed, including support workers.

People have to feel needed, even counsellors. They have to feel that there are things going on for them...What

is in it for them? Where are the outlets for their creativity...[and] their input? -Supported Independent Living Worker -

One Program Coordinator suggested that the manner in which one approached management and work-problems had a lot to do with whether or not one got results. She asserted that she had been well-supported by upper management and attributed it to keeping a positive and mature attitude when she was dealing with an issue. She felt very comfortable approaching the Executive Director with problems. Part of that improvement she felt had also been the result of the addition of Program Coordinators at ACL.

Some respondents suggested that central office was responsive to some front-line staff members, and not to others. One Program Coordinator suggested that this was the result of favouritism at central office. A Support Worker said that upper management prejudged staff and situations, and then remained closed-minded to them. One Program Coordinator said that once a staff member had been "black-balled" by management he/she would not be listened to at central office.

There were many different opinions of the role of the union at ACL. Negative views of the union were also expressed and did not seem to be restricted to respondents from management. Several of the respondents suggested that poor communication between management and union was the

result of the confrontational approach of the present union executives. A few respondents suggested that the union executives were not objective and sometimes created problems. In fact, one Program Coordinator believed that there were many union members who held anti-management sentiments which had no basis. However, a union representative countered that if there were not legitimate problems at ACL to be dealt with by the union, then the union would not need to exist. This respondent suggested that because the union challenged management more often than in previous years that, union executives often got targeted as trouble makers. Another Program Coordinator felt the union was important, but she did not trust her union because she had seen instances where the union had failed to support staff members. Still another Program Coordinator was frustrated by the unresponsiveness of the union and said that the union was not in the position to criticize management because it did not have open communication either.

Social Support and Recognition

Several respondents suggested that support was important in determining their experience of stress. Respondents believed that if they had more support, they would experience less stress, particularly from management. One Program Coordinator asserted that if there was not

enough support for staff members, everyone suffered. Many respondents expected support from their unit manager and/or upper management. In fact, one Full-time Support Worker felt that she had received more support from front-line workers than she did from management. She felt that as far as upper management was concerned it was often the case of "too little, too late." One Program Coordinator said that any time an employee felt like s/he was alone at work, it made the job harder. An Upper Manager said that central office staff members often went out to the field to assure front-line employees that they were not alone.

A number of respondents suggested that they felt that management did not recognize stress as a priority issue and, therefore, nothing was going to be done about it. One Program Coordinator asserted that even if management were to simply recognize the issue of stress, staff would receive support. Another Program Coordinator suggested that recognition by management of the "toughness" of the front-line would offer significant support to staff.

I think if you don't feel important and you
...[feel]...that management is not acknowledging what
you do as important, [then]...you will gain a real
negative attitude...There have been days where I've
worked myself over the limit and I ['ve been] real
anxious...[If] management had come in [and said],
"Everything is great!", then I would have felt better.

- Program Coordinator -

Philosophies

Many respondents described stress arising from conflicts over the philosophy of care at ACL. Conflicts between staff members would often evolve from differences in personal belief systems. For example, one Part-time Support Worker discussed how stressful it was for her to be in a confrontation with her Program Coordinator over which available community services labelled clients negatively and which did not, for example, a community service for the clients that referred to them as "handicapped". She argued against her Program Coordinator that even if a service potentially label clients negatively, it was important to take advantage of whatever services were offered, just to get the clients out in the community. Conflicts between staff members would often arise when disagreeing "what was best" for the client. One Program Coordinator recalled discussing a client's weight with other staff members. The other staff members were complaining because the client was not in an exercise program. These staff members argued that an exercise program would benefit the client because she would lose weight and she would get out into the community. However, the Program Coordinator countered by saying that it would be too difficult and hard on everyone concerned to try to place her in such a program because it would be against

her will.

You try and get these people into an exercise program [and] you [will] make your life hell. You [also] make their life hell. And, you make everyone they live with...[suffer]...Why would you do that? - Program Coordinator -

Staff members were sometimes in conflict with themselves over the philosophy of care. For example, a Program Coordinator described how difficult it was for her sometimes to support clients by remaining only on the "outskirts", while letting her clients do things for themselves. An upper manager suggested that it was difficult for staff members because they were encouraging clients to make their own decisions, but at the same time they were also responsible for them.

Respondents suggested that front-line staff members also found it stressful to be in conflict with ACL's policies. Different respondents found themselves to be at odds with policies in different ways. In most cases, these differences surrounded the implementation of a philosophy of independent/community living. A Full-time Support Worker said that the philosophy of independent living really did not exist at ACL. She saw a lot of contradictions between the philosophy of independent living and its application. She indicated that the philosophy of ACL was more one of best possible care. One Part-time Support Worker felt that

clients did not receive natural consequences that someone who was "normal" would, for example, suspension for fighting at work. If community living was the goal, these natural consequences were absolutely necessary, so as to better integrate the client. In contrast, another Program Coordinator said that sometimes clients needed to have support pushed on them, even if they refused it, because adhering absolutely to the values of independent living meant that clients sometimes did not get enough support. Seeing a client not receive enough support was very upsetting to her. A Substitute Support Worker suggested that in the rush to "normalize" clients ACL had given clients a form of coercive freedom.

In this incredible race to naturalize and normalize [clients'] lives, [we have created] a coerced kind of free[dom]. You must be free. It's a dogmatic freedom. [Like saying], 'Hurry up and finish your breakfast, so we can get out in the community!' - Substitute Support Worker -

He asserted that he did not make the clients do anything or stop them from doing anything, unless they were going to hurt someone. Another Part-time Support Worker felt that part of independent living philosophy meant that she had to cater to the choices of the clients always, regardless of what she thought or wanted.

Standards

Philosophies of care were particularly stressful when they were implemented, usually in the form program policies. Given the diversity of interpretation of philosophy independent/community living, it became apparent that there was also much diversity in the implementation of this philosophy. In fact, it was the inconsistency with which the policies of ACL were applied by its employees that was the main focus of several respondents. Many respondents described being frustrated by rules or by policies being applied differently by different people throughout the agency or sometimes even by the same person. Moreover, respondents associated the application of ACL's policies with managers because managers were the individuals who had the power to implement policy on the front-line. One Program Coordinator suggested it was stressful not knowing what her manager would expect from one day to the next. A Full-time Support Worker said that staff were often threatened by the possibility of discipline by a manager who applied policies and was motivated by personal issues. She also believed that many staff members were often disciplined for silly reasons. One Part-time Support Worker asserted that consistency in the group homes was very important for the clients, especially since clients were exposed to so many different staff members throughout the week. Without the consistency of rules, clients would exhibit many more negative

behaviours which makes the job tougher for staff members. One Unit Manager said that it was sometimes difficult for staff members because on one hand management expected consistency, precision and regularity (for example, fire drills, and med counts), but on the other hand expected staff members to tolerate ambiguity (for example, frequently moving the clients from one residence to another).

Some respondents suggested that the inconsistencies in policy were often the result of the lack of education about policy issues, such as independent/community living. A Supported Independent Living Worker suggested that no effort was made by ACL to educate employees about their policies, so it was not difficult to understand why employees were implementing the policies differently. In short, staff members were ignorant of them. However, another Supported Independent Living Worker said that expecting employees to know all of ACL policies was ridiculous and inconsistent application of policies may occur for good reasons. Perhaps having those reasons communicated would be enough to reduce stress.

Some respondents suggested that policies were sometimes unfair because they differed with respect to which group of people to whom they were applied. A union representative suggested that there was a double standard between front-line staff and managers that was unfair. This respondent indicated that front-line staff members were often more

vulnerable to discipline than were managers, which made employees feel threatened. Similarly, another Full-time Support Worker said that there was a double standard between staff and clients. In her case, after being sexually harassed by a client, she felt that her human rights were unfairly subordinated to the client's.

Some employees were frustrated being constrained by any policies. A Part-time Support Worker got frustrated when she was "tied down" by rules and regulations. A Substitute Support Worker said having so many rules and regulations mired down the lives of the clients and made his job frustrating. Moreover, he suggested that often rules impeded the goal of independent living because they took away any spontaneity that might be associated with having a "normal" life. For example, he described how difficult it was for him just to take a client to a baseball game in the United States because of all that the rules required of him. Rules were an unintended evil that suppress individual freedom, according to this respondent:

An unfortunate circumstance of organization is that even sentiment has to have a regulation....There is a rule...that has to cover when these guys feel like hanging out [or] goofing off all day. I don't think it's any individual's fault. It's an unintended evil of the system. - Substitute Support Worker -

However, he also said that when rules that seem noble were

violated for the sake of convenience many employees became disillusioned. For example, if an employee saw management demonstrate a blatant disregard for their own policy of independent living, as he/she viewed it, he/she may lose interest in advocating for independent living. If rules seemed more human, he asserted, they would be easier for everyone.

Use of Humour

An issue that came up repeatedly during the interviews and often related to the relationship between stress and social interactions was the use of humour on the job. As one Supported Independent Living Worker phrased it, humour on the job was essential because front-line staff must deal with very sombre and mundane issues on daily basis. A Part-time Support Worker said that not only did humour provide her relief in tense situations, but it helped her maintain a good rapport with her co-workers. One Program Coordinator felt that if she were not able to laugh at things, she would most certainly go crazy.

By twisting and warping a negative experience, it could be transformed into something positive. Through the use of humour, what first appeared like a disaster could be made into a manageable problem. One upper manager said that many employees got too serious about their jobs. She suggested that one could be a professional without being stodgy,

rigid, and too clinical.

Explaining why humour was important was difficult for many respondents. One Full-time Sleepover said that when she was laughing she was not "taking things to heart." A Part-time Support Worker said that she just felt more relaxed when she used humour. She also felt that it created better relationships with other staff members, such that working together and sharing responsibilities became much easier. An upper manager said that humour was a good way to learn about a person and his/her limits. One Supported Independent Living Worker suggested that her clients sometimes had a predisposed anger and resentment toward staff and family because these people have always tried to control them, but that humour was a good way to get clients to deal with these issues more positively.

You have to learn to laugh at yourself. A lot of our people have...resentments towards family [and] towards caregivers because they don't want to be told what to do. They want somebody to understand them and where they are coming from...and sometimes the only way that they know how to deal with things is...through anger. It's nice to be able to get them to use humour to solve some of their problems. -Supported Independent Living Worker.-

Other Salient Findings

Violence in the Workplace

An issue that many respondents mentioned during the interviews that had an impact on the experience of front-line staff concerned physical or verbal attacks by clients, often referred to as "behaviours" or acting out. Many of the respondents suggested that there was a high prevalence of violent attacks made on staff at ACL. A union representative described addressing the issue of violence in the workplace with an upper level manager. This respondent suggested that the Health and Safety Committee needed to deal with this issue immediately:

We've had some people walk off their shifts with broken noses, people rushed to the hospital for surgery...We've had broken noses, women almost losing their babies...You (management) have to do something about violence here (ACL). -Union Representative-

According to this respondent, the manager to whom she addressed the complaint suggested that violence was part of front-line work and employees needed to accept that.

Respondents indicated that violent attacks were one of the most stressful aspects of front-line work. One Vocational Support Worker described being beaten up at work repeatedly. Moreover, she said that she was now frightened of some of her clients. She recalled that throughout the duration of her pregnancy, she was extremely frightened of one client with whom she worked. One Program Coordinator

described how drained she got after a whole shift with a client who screamed constantly because she could never take a break.

Several respondents described being frustrated because they did not know what to do when a client was acting out. In fact, one Program Coordinator asserted that staff members were setting themselves up for dismissal if they worked with violent clients because if they ever did anything wrong during a violent episode they would be fired. A Part-time Support Worker described just moving out of the way of violent clients because that was all she felt she could do. One Full-time Vocational Support Worker asserted that once clients began to hit there was really nothing one could do to control them.

Some respondents suggested that clients often were violent because they did not know how to live in society. One Unit Manager said that clients often did not know any other way of life other than how to survive in an institution which included violence.

A lot of people were raised in institutions and they have learned how to deal with people and things [differently than]] we take for granted. [For example], you don't attack somebody with a knife just because you want what they've got. They did...that because they had to do that to get what they wanted in the institution....So, when they come out, it's hard to

make them realize [that's] not the way things are. -

Unit Manager -

A Substitute Support Worker said that often his clients live life with a sense of urgency such that staff members had to deal with small problems immediately before they blew up into bigger ones that staff could not handle.

Some respondents suggested that in many cases staff were to blame for their client's behaviours. A Part-time Support Worker said that often she saw staff incite clients to behaviours because they did not know how to deal with certain clients or they were playing favourites among clients. One upper manager said that staff have been oversensitive to what they considered to be a behaviour in the past, but that now not everything should be considered a behaviour (for example, a client not wanting to eat supper).

Other respondents suggested that there was a general undervaluing of staff human rights in the human service fields to that of the clients because client rights often became superordinate. Consequently, staff members were often expected to deal with violent outbursts and sexual advancements as part of their jobs. One female Support Worker described being sexually assaulted by a client. She said that one of the most stressful aspects of the whole ordeal was the lack of support that she received from management because they seemed to have more interest in the welfare of the client than her. A Unit Manager described how

she was forced to transfer a female support worker because a male client was repeatedly masturbating in front of her. Because the situation was so hard on the staff member and she could not get the client to stop, she had to transfer the staff member, even though this support worker enjoyed the house in all other respects. One Full-time Vocational Support Worker felt that often consequences for clients when they were violent were cushioned because they were disabled. However, this did not help the clients because it excused those behaviours. She also suggested that often when a client had a behaviour it was the staff member who was seen as "the bad guy" or as incompetent. Several respondents indicated that if the goal of ACL was independent/community living, then violent clients should experience the consequences that any other member of society would.

A Unit Manager agreed that staff members were often "left out hanging to dry" when it came to dealing with violent clients because there was nothing staff members could do to control that client:

Yesterday, a girl got bit. Now, she's trying to deal with a man [who's] 2 ft. taller than her [and] outweighs her by 100 lbs. She cannot discipline. She cannot send him to his room or [even] tell him he's being bad. She has to try [to] counsel him...and that's very, very stressful. - Unit Manager -

She described intervening upon one unfortunate staff member

who had locked herself in a room, as a male client destroyed some furniture and the door trying to get to her. She felt sorry for the staff member because the woman had done nothing to warrant the attack; the client just did not like her. In fact, this staff member was labelled by many people at ACL as a trouble-maker who incited clients and could not deal with violent situations while her manager felt that it was entirely the result of an unfortunate mix of personalities. This manager suggested that often staff members were criticized by management when dealing with violent situations, instead of being supported.

Some managers will say, 'Well, you didn't act professionally. When he went for this, you should have moved this or you should have done this.' [Now], the front-line staff are worried about what [their] manager is going to say about how [they] dealt with something [at the same time as] they're trying to [cope] with someone who outweighs them [by 100 lbs.]. - Unit Manager -

In many cases, she suggested, staff members had not been able to see the long term pay-offs of dealing with violence in a non-directive way and, thus, became frustrated. Some respondents indicated that often there was a negative assumption made by management that dealing with violent clients was part of front-line work and, therefore, went with the territory. One Full-time Vocational Support Worker

agreed that employees were obligated to deal with violent clients as part of their work, but asserted that they should also be protected.

Some respondents suggested that although violent clients were stressful, stress could be reduced by the way in which staff dealt with violent situations. A union representative said that stress from violent situations came from staff not having the "tools" to deal with such situations for example, a contingency plan to protect other clients in the immediate surroundings. Often, staff had to trust their intuition in violent situations. One Program Coordinator said that having known her clients for a number of years she was better able to judge violent outbreaks, which had greatly reduced her stress in those situations.

Some respondents suggested that it was more difficult to cope with violent clients when one was working alone. One Program Coordinator said that it was particularly stressful for residential workers who often were the only staff member on shift. A Vocational Support Worker said that violent behaviours were not as difficult to deal with in vocational because there was always more than one staff member on a shift. A Program Coordinator asserted that staff members could learn how to better deal with clients by watching other staff members, but unfortunately because staff members often work alone, there was not any opportunity to see other staff-client interactions.

Family Issues

Many respondents felt that the interplay between work life and home life could be stressful for front-line employees. Some respondents suggested that family issues were important at ACL because a high proportion of employees were women. Because of the large proportion of women, a union representative suggested that some common influences could be particularly important for front-line stress such as, having a limited income, being the sole supporter of children, or being abused by a spouse. One upper manager suggested that work was particularly difficult for employees who had trouble coordinating their schedule between home and work, such as mothers with school-age children.

Some respondents thought that front-line stress also resulted when home life overlapped too much with work. One Program Coordinator said that she got sick of doing things twice because her work activities were often duplicated at home. She felt as though she had two families and two homes, and all the responsibilities that went along with them. She did suggest, however, that if she were better able to coordinate between home and work that her stress would be greatly reduced.

One Full-time Support Worker sometimes felt miserable and bitchy because she never got a break from her responsibilities at home and at work. She said that it was

draining because she had to be constantly vigilant at home and work. Her only break was her drive to and from work. She indicated that she seldom got to relax because of her small children. She felt that it would be great for teambuilding and communication if she could get together with other staff members, but she did not have the time or money. Perhaps, if there were after-hour activities for children, mothers could get together. Moreover, low-cost child care would be a great benefit to her. In contrast, some respondents felt their own families were valuable supports. One Program Coordinator said that her parents helped a great deal when she was going through a particularly bad time at work. In fact, she said that they often came over to the group home occasionally to help her out with things. Being able to access the support of the clients' families and volunteers was a big help to staff members, according to respondents.

Being a Woman in the Workplace

Throughout the interviews, some respondents brought up the issue of ACL have a predominantly female workforce. Some respondents suggested that this was a particularly salient aspect of issues such as coordinating between work and home life, and working with violent clients. One union representative said that because the majority of staff were women it meant that within the context of their family life they were often coping with some common societal issues

simultaneously with work, for example, being physical and/or sexual abused, having low and fixed incomes, being single mothers or family mothers. In many cases, these issues could add unseen home-life burdens on female employees. For example, one Program Coordinator suggested that residential work was particularly hard, if you were a woman and had a family, because you were usually working evening hours and, therefore, did not get to see your family. However, she said in residential there was an expectation that that kind of compromise just "came with the turf." Moreover, a predominately female workforce led to "gendered" interactions with clients, particularly male clients. For example, a Substitute Support Worker said that sometimes male clients had difficulty dealing with female staff members, especially in terms of authority, because they tended to think about gender in very rigid, stereotyped ways. Sometimes, he suggested, it could lead to confrontation and violence in the workplace.

Employee Qualities

Some respondents discussed the qualities of employees who were successful on the front-line or were not successful and how stress might impact them. The qualities that were discussed by respondents included maturity, flexibility, proactivity, respectfulness, openness and "givingness". One Program Coordinator suggested that the match between the

characters of the employees and the group home setting was vital. She said that staff selection and orientation was central to her because new staff were not just starting a job, but would be influencing the lives of her clients.

A Full-time Sleepover Support Worker felt that a lot of job stress was the result of many employees being immature. She suggested that because of immaturity, there were more conflicts over petty issues. Conflict in a work setting over petty issues created stress, but mature employees did not fight about trivial problems. Moreover, maturity was not necessarily related to chronological age. She also suggested that immaturity was associated with not believing in the decisions you made and that not believing in your decisions created stress. However, maturity was also associated with being able to admit when you were wrong. A Supported Independent Living Worker agreed that maturity affected decision making and that it was associated with the lack of self-confidence. One Unit Manager believed that staff and managers who were flexible on the job were involved in fewer confrontations. She also felt that issues like flexibility and immaturity were a product of the social relationships in the work setting. A Substitute Support Worker said that flexibility was essential for any employee's success.

If you are going to survive in this line of work, you can't go in...with one position alone. You have to roll with the punches.- Substitute Support Worker -

He also said that successful staff members were always respectful of other staff and the clients. Even if staff don't like clients or staff personally, they will always respect them and try to promote the "personhood" of everyone in the home.

A Program Coordinator said that front-line employees have to be the kind of people who could get close to other people. She suggested that employees had to be comfortable with others constantly moving in and out of their "personal" spaces. Anyone who was not comfortable with being close to other people and open was going to have a difficult time on the job, she warned. One Substitute Support Worker suggested that many employees who got into the human services were very "giving." He said that such individuals would serve other people without taking or expecting anything in return, until all of sudden they were not getting anything at all from their work. He said that sometimes staff who were "giving" had difficulty confronting others with problems and eventually could get disillusioned and stop giving.

One upper manager suggested that successful employees were proactive and that proactive employees experienced less stress. This manager said that proactive employees were problem solvers and, therefore, if anything became a source of stress for them they sought out alternatives to deal with it. People who were not proactive were stressed by problems because they did not take the initiative to solve them.

Employees who were not proactive passively let things happen to them and felt powerless to make any changes. Often such employees would passively let things go wrong or sabotaged them, instead of offering alternative solutions. This manager suggested, however, that through good teamwork, many employees could learn to become proactive.

Job Types and Work Settings

A number of respondents suggested that there were differences in the nature of stress between job types and work settings. One upper manager said that part-time employees had less stress than full-time employees, but had more stress than substitute employees. These differences were due mainly to the differences in amount of responsibility and the number of hours that were worked by an employee. She did feel that work would be difficult for Substitute Support Workers because they were on call and, thus, probably had the aggravation of not being able to plan their lives. Moreover, she said that program coordinators probably experienced more stress because of the emphasis on organization in their job.

A few respondents indicated that the lack of communication between vocational and residential services created stress for a number of employees. Some respondents suggested that there was a difference in the nature of stress between vocational and residential work settings. One

Vocational Support Worker said that there was much more stress in residential than in vocational services. She said the key to the difference was that vocational employees were much more likely to leave work behind after their shift was over than were residential employees. She asserted that residential workers often thought about work after work hours because the activities of a residential worker were not that much different from his/her activities at home. Moreover, she said that residential workers were much more likely to be disturbed by calls from work after hours than were vocational workers. A Residential Program Coordinator believed that residential work was particularly tough because one was called upon to fill many varying roles at work in any given shift including a maid, nurse, accountant, a mother, a recreational leader, etc. A Supported Independent Living Worker said that in supported independent living, workers were much less likely to be stressed by clients who act out against them than were residential workers because the clients had much more freedom to express their desires.

Organization and Time

Another issue discussed by a few respondents that created stress for them was organization. Specifically, the difficulty of coordinating many or diverse activities seemed to create stress for a few respondents. Organizing time to

perform certain activities also seemed to be related to some respondents experience of stress. One Program Coordinator said that she often experienced stress organizing the lives of four clients, but that if things were organized it made activities operated much more smoothly. She also indicated that sometimes there was a tension in her job between completing the paperwork for which she was responsible and spending time with her clients. Another Program Coordinator liked the split between paperwork and front-line work because it added diversity to her job. One Supported Independent Living Worker got really frustrated if she forgot to do things or ran out of time. She also became frustrated trying to meet deadlines.

Change

Change was thought to have both positive and negative effects on staff, depending upon its nature. Several respondents indicated that they were excited and rewarded by positive change in their clients, although sometimes because it was slow it could be frustrating. It was particularly rewarding for one Program Coordinator to see subtle changes in the "life" attitudes of her clients. A Part-time Support Worker said that she was very rewarded by seeing her clients learn.

However, other kinds of change could be frustrating. One Program Coordinator thought that it was stressful for

staff members and clients when new staff members came into the group home. An upper manager said that consistency in staff and scheduling could greatly influence the smooth operation of a group home. A Program Coordinator asserted that she became frustrated sometimes because she could not count on things being the same from one day to the next.

What to Do About Stress

Employee Assistance Plan

For the most part, respondents, both management and union, did not think an employee assistance plan (EAP) was necessary for dealing with stress. Most respondents associated an EAP with the provision of counselling services for employees who were experiencing problems. However, one upper manager suggested that an EAP could also include memberships to health clubs, lists of resources such as babysitting services, and educational material. This manager also said that similar services could be established through the health and safety committees, without calling them an EAP, provided that a staff position and funding was devoted to them. A union representative used to believe that an EAP was a good idea, but now doesn't because of the cost associated with it. A Supported Independent Living Worker asserted that if ACL decided to give an EAP the priority, funding for it could be found somewhere.

There were quite diverse opinion as to the purpose that counselling services might serve and whether or not they would be valuable. Some respondents felt that counselling would be highly valuable, while others believed it was not necessary. One Full-time Sleepover Support Worker believed that counselling could address issues such as physical abuse and substance abuse which affect employees on the job. She asserted that counselling was important because it was impossible to disentangle the issue of stress from other issues, such as alcoholism, abuse, and lack of self-confidence. A Program Coordinator believed that employees did not need any counselling, but instead just needed a little more support on the job. One Part-time Support Worker said that support groups were just like having a "sounding board", but unfortunately no action would result in positive changes from just sitting around "sounding off."

Respondent also disagreed on whether or not employees would actually use counselling services. Some respondents felt that staff members would not take advantage of counselling services because of the fear of rumours. Other respondents also said that employees would be too embarrassed to use counselling services. One Supported Independent Living Worker believed that support groups could be successful, if confidentiality was assured. A Full-time Support Worker suggested that support groups would turn into gossip mills, even if confidentiality was assured.

Respondents did seem to agree that it was not the responsibility of ACL to reduce unhealthy lifestyle responses to stress. Some respondents suggested that unhealthy lifestyle habits such as smoking, overeating, and substance abuse were ways in which some employees relieved stress. One Supported Independent Living Worker suggested that as long as unhealthy habits did not affect one's work, they were not the business of ACL. Both management and union representatives said that it was not the responsibility of ACL to try and stop these kind of unhealthy responses to stress, and suggested instead that it was the responsibility of the individuals' to change their bad habits. One Supported Independent Living Worker believed that it would be much too hard to change bad habits. A union representative said it would be a waste of money to try to change the unhealthy lifestyles of employees.

Relief

Several respondents indicated that the degree to which one was able to "get away" for awhile at work had an important impact on stress. One union representative indicated that relief from "tense" situations at work relieved stress, but that many employees did not have the opportunity to take breaks from "tense" situations. A Supported Independent Living Worker thought that employees who were having real problems coping at work could benefit

greatly by taking some time off.

Respondents asserted that being able to take a break helped alleviate front-line stress in different ways. A Full-time Sleepover and a Part-time Support Worker said that smoking was a way to relieve stress for them because they were able to get away by themselves and relax. The Full-time Sleepover also thought that being able to "walk away" from a particularly stressful situation for a couple of minutes gave her enough time to calm down. She also indicated that unfortunately sometimes she was not able to do this because she often worked alone. In fact, some shifts had been really draining because she worked for 8 hours straight without a chance to get away. A Program Coordinator said that she became stressed when she could not get away from a client who was bothering her. One Unit Manager said that she liked to play "hooky" sometimes if she was having a particularly rough day. On such days, she went to one of the group homes where she felt most comfortable, had some coffee, and pretended she was not there. A Part-time Support Worker said that in order to unwind she would often concentrate on something else for awhile, like the music on her car radio. One Substitute Support Worker said that he had to mentally prepare before he went to work. He would go and sit in a coffee shop for an hour before his shift and just do nothing.

Education

Many of the respondents thought that education seminars on stress and related topics could greatly benefit employees at ACL. One Supported Independent Living Worker said that education was one of the best ways to open minds and solve problems in the agency:

I think if everybody was educated enough to understand [that there are other ways of doing things besides their own],...a lot of things would get ironed out before they escalated to stress. That's the secret. Stop it before it [becomes] stress. - Supported Independent Living Worker -

She also asserted that educating employees was far more advantageous than punishing them. One union representative thought that education was invaluable, especially on stress, because it would bring recognition of problems. One Part-time Support Worker said that education on any topic would reduce stress because it would give employees alternatives for doing their jobs better.

Respondents often valued education so much that cost was not perceived to be an obstacle. One union representative believed that if management thought that education was important enough, funding could be found somewhere and other areas of the budget could be cut. A Supported Independent Living Worker thought that management would be better to pay for more education because it would

pay-off in the long run. A Substitute Support Worker warned, however, that education was beneficial only up to a point because it did not address all aspects of employees.

Several respondents suggested that education, not necessarily on stress, was often important because it benefitted the agency in many ways. In fact, a Supported Independent Living Worker thought that seminars about communication would be much more helpful to agency than stress seminars and they would help employees deal with stress at the same time. One Program Coordinator thought that seminars on coping with stress and communication would be an ideal balance.

Education was important because it exposed employees to more diverse views of issues, especially organization-wide seminars, and thus increased communication. One Program Coordinator believed that education was beneficial because it opens lines of communication between staff and management. A Full-time Vocational Support Worker suggested that decreasing education at ACL would inevitably create communication problems for the agency.

A few respondents expressed the desire to see education provided that was of more use to them on the job. They indicated that seminars in the past tended to be helpful, but that some had lacked connection to the workplace and, therefore, were not always useful. One Program Coordinator thought the seminars should focus specifically on her field.

Another Program Coordinator said that any stress seminars should focus specifically on how to cope with stress on the job. A Full-time Vocational Support Worker thought that the seminars were more valuable if staff could relate to them, especially if it was staff themselves who led the seminars.

Respondents also offered several suggestions regarding how education should be delivered to employees. Many respondents thought that education should be paid for by ACL and some thought it should be mandatory. A union representative stressed how important it was to make sure that education was available to all employees, and not just to a select few. Moreover, this respondent believed that seminars should be conducted at regular continuous intervals, and not just periodically. This respondent believed that some education could be handled through regular unit meetings, but that organization-wide seminars were still extremely valuable. A Part-time Support Worker thought that using staff members to research and present seminars would be a good idea, as long as they were paid for the extra time. A union representative suggested that one of the most unfortunate things about educational seminars was that information did not get distributed to all the employees because employees who went to seminars did not bring back information for their co-employees. One Program Coordinator felt that seminars that encouraged employees to brainstorm were more valuable than ones where employees

passively received information.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

A diverse range of views were represented in the data collection of the present research. Because the methodology purposefully attempted to construct consensus from interviews and ACL organizational documents, some categories and their frameworks became salient features of stress in the agency. First, it seemed evident from the interviews that teamwork, communication, and violence in the workplace were regarded as extremely important in determining the degree to which front-line employees experienced stress. Other issues arose which seemed to be directly related to teamwork, including responsibility, authority, participation in decision making, and social interaction. Yet other issues related to stress seemed to influence the nature and implementation of teamwork, including management and employee relations, social support and recognition, implementation of philosophies and standards, and the use of humour. Again, this framework is graphically depicted in Figure 1. Other stress-related issues included employee qualities, job types, job settings, family issues, women in the workplace, organization and time, and change. In addition, issues arose surrounding what ACL as an organization could do about the negative impact of stress on its front-line employees. Discussion included an employee

assistance plan, education, and relief.

In the present discussion, the possible connections between some of the present research themes and the stress literature will be discussed, including themes such as control, participation in decision making, and social interaction. In addition, the present discussion will explore some themes not typically associated with stress literature. In particular, the associations between stress and organizational communication, the administration of policies, the use of humour, and violence, will be addressed. Second, some of the findings of the research will be discussed with regard to the criticism that research in work psychology is overly focused upon individuals, as well as, the political consequences of this focus. Third, the relationship between communication, teamwork, and management/labour relations will be discussed. Fourth, the viability of the transactional approach to stress will also be examined, particularly with respect to its congruency to the present methodology and its relationship to the present research findings. Specifically, can the transaction approach be reconciled with the abilities of a constructivist approach to deal with the multiplicity of stress meanings, to focus upon dynamic interactions and process during data analysis, and to incorporate the political implications of research? And last, some limitations of the present methodology and future directions

for research will be discussed.

It is important to remind the reader that what is offered here is yet another construction based upon information gleaned from the joint construction and the interviews. It is not the explicit purpose of this discussion to make generalizations about the findings beyond the present research context and its subsequent data. (See Guba & Lincoln, 1985, for a discussion of transferability).

What Does It Mean?

When Guba (1990) discussed the term paradigm, he suggested that leaving the definition in problematic limbo was useful because it was possible for the concept to continually change as our understanding of it changed. In the present study, it could be argued that the term stress is also valuable left in problematic limbo. Even though the initial interview protocol specifically asked respondents to describe stress, most respondents abandoned this task in favour of discussing the implications of associated issues. For example, when asked to describe stress, many respondents commonly began to talk about poor communication and how it created stress for them. As such, the present study did not try to encapsulate stress in a definition. The meaning of stress was defined by the respondents and the researcher according to issues that they found most salient and at the levels of abstraction of their choice.

In the present study, the term "stress" became a hollow vessel into which the research participants poured their own essences of meaning. The entire data collection and analysis, and its presentation in this document could be considered our creation of a definition for stress. However, it was not essential that the research process result in a specific definition of stress. Instead, constructivism, according to Guba and Lincoln (1989), focuses upon the claims, concerns, and issues surrounding the object of inquiry for the very reason that the object of inquiry itself cannot be ultimately defined. The main focus of the present methodology was that of building some consensus surrounding these claims, concerns, and issues. However, disparate views were also represented; thus, providing evidence that consensus is not always possible and meaning is not always clear.

The tension between framing consensual, or common, meaning, while at the same time preserving the diversity of meaning represented by the sample was evident in the present study. Where it was not possible to present consensus, the researcher attempted to present the diversity of meaning surrounding categories created by the research process. Perhaps nowhere is this more evident than in two particular sections of the findings, philosophies and standards. In discussing what was "best for the client" with respect to independent/community living, many different viewpoints were

presented. Different respondents had very different views on what it meant to live independently in the community. Moreover, respondents had vastly divergent opinions as to how a philosophy, such as independent/community living, should be implemented⁵. However, respondents did seem to agree with respect to a few aspects of this philosophy and its application. First, respondents agreed that there was a great deal of inconsistency with respect to the way that the independent/community living philosophy at ACL was implemented which created stress for front-line staff members. Second, they agreed that conflict between staff members, and staff members and managers over the implementation of independent/community living policy also created stress for employees on the front-line.

From this example, the value of including disparate views of the research object, as well as common ones, becomes evident. Most respondents agreed that inconsistency in the implementation of the philosophy of independent/community living created stress for front-line staff members. However, most respondents had a different view of exactly what this philosophy was. Inconsistency in its application resulted from these vastly divergent views. Respondents also agreed that conflicts between people transpired when there was disagreement over implementation that resulted from these dissimilar views. Although conflicts were often between staff members, as well as

between staff members and policies, or staff members and management, they were also the result of multiple interpretations of the same philosophy by different managers, and even by the same manager from one time to the next. Particularly, variants in the application of independent/community living resulted when people in the positions to enforce implementation, enforced it differently. Moreover, conflict often resulted when one view of the philosophy superceded others as the appropriate view by virtue of belonging to someone who had the legitimate power to implement his/her particular vision of it, such as in the case of a Unit Manager.

Where Do the Results Fit In?

Even though the present research methodology valued the diversity of meaning, the attempt was made to build consensus on issues that surfaced during the research interviews in order to facilitate action. Perhaps not so surprisingly, there was much consistency in the research themes. Moreover, many of the themes that were addressed by participants were themes that have already been addressed in the occupational stress literature. For example, themes related to occupational stress reviewed in the literature that seemed to surface again in the present study included control, participation in decision making, and social support. Other issues also arose that have not been

typically related to stress in the literature which included the use of humour, communication patterns, and the administration of policies. Let us now consider how each of these concepts, in turn, may have implications in the present study.

The Themes of the Research

The most salient themes in the present research were those relating to teamwork, communication, and violence in the workplace. It was extremely difficult to tease apart these categories and make them absolutely clear. However, I would argue that that was not the purpose of the present inquiry. In fact, the categories represented by the research were the researcher's attempt to represent the discourse surrounding the multiple meanings of stress belonging to people at ACL. The themes that became most salient during the research process are important for two broad reasons. One, these themes serve as a way for individuals to represent and discuss stress in the workplace at ACL. As such, these themes, because they were reported to ACL and were a product of a diverse sample of respondents at ACL, provide an impetus for action in the organization. However, because action takes place, the politics and power dynamics of the research then become evident. The second reason these themes are important was that they were created by a research process that was very different from conventional

research methodologies. As a result, the themes provide us with a very different view of the research object, stress, and, thus, a different way of viewing the world. Consequently, they also add to our understanding of stress as it exists in the stress literature.

Themes of Control

Sauter et al (1989) suggested that control is one of the largest contributors to job strain and its physiological concomitants. Some of the constructs discussed in the present literature review that include elements of control were locus of control, role ambiguity, role conflict, participation in decision making, employee choice, and job autonomy. Consistent with the literature, the present research results suggested that some of these constructs have value in the present context.

Participation in decision making (PDM) has arisen repeatedly in the literature related to occupational stress outcomes. Spector (1986) suggested in his meta-analysis that in 3 samples, physical symptoms were negatively associated with PDM and in another 4 samples, emotional distress was also negatively associated with PDM. Several respondents in the present study suggested that stress in their work was associated with not receiving important information or receiving miscommunication. Respondents seemed to suggest that if they were allowed to participate in decisions there

would not be a breakdown in communication and that they would experience less stress. At minimum, it was suggested that if staff members were kept informed about decisions, they would experience less stress. Respondents described being frustrated when they felt that management was not listening to them or they were not being taken seriously. One respondent suggested that decisions by management were frustrating because they were often ill-informed and motivated out of convenience. If staff input had been included in decisions, then the impact of those decisions on staff and clients would not have been as stressful. The use of authority also became a salient feature of stress in the agency. Particularly, when people in positions of authority used a "my way is the only way" attitude in managing or supervising a work setting, it was reported to be very stressful for employees. In contrast, if managers or supervisors included employees in decisions and were compromising, staff indicated they experienced less stress. Respondents also suggested that, to lessen the impact of stress, managers and supervisors should be accessible to and supportive of staff.

Role ambiguity and role conflict are two other constructs that have also been related to job strain. In the present study, respondents often talked about the paradoxical position of staff with the clients that can be frustrating. Staff were expected to promote independent

living in a non-directive way. That is, according to policy, staff members could not intervene in the activities of clients in any way except to provide support. Moreover, they were directed to always encourage decision making and self-direction in their clients, and they could not physically or verbally restrain their clients from doing anything.

However, while staff attempted to fulfil these duties they were also expected to be responsible for the group home, its operations, the health and safety of all the clients in it, and community relations. In short, respondents suggested that staff were given a great deal of responsibility, but very little control over the clients and the work setting. It was often suggested that this could be a very frustrating position for staff to be placed. Moreover, a few respondents suggested that it was frustrating when management expected staff to be regimented and organized where things like scheduling, medications, and fire drills were concerned, but at the same time, flexible and spontaneous in order to respond to the varying needs of the agency and the clients.

As far as role ambiguity is concerned, inconsistency, particularly in standards, was also connected repeatedly by respondents with the experience of stress. Often, staff members became stressed when policies did not inform them of what to do or were applied differently depending upon who was involved. Again, with respect to communication, respondents suggested that not having correct information or

not having information at all led to stress.

Locus of control did not arise in the interviews as a main criterion in determining employees' experience of stress. However, one upper level manager talked about a similar distinction. This respondent referred to "proactive" employees who, she suggested, experienced much less stress than employees who were not proactive. She described proactive employees as problem solvers, which is consistent with the literature on internals, and as seeking out solutions to problems if they were experiencing stress. In contrast, reactive employees were described as passively letting things happen to them and feeling powerless to change them. Similarly, another upper level manager attempted to distinguish between successful and unsuccessful employees by focusing upon an employee's initiative and problem-solving abilities.

Job autonomy was another construct that did not seem to relate wholly to findings in the present study. Recall that job autonomy refers to the degree to which an individual has freedom, independence and discretion in determining procedures of work and scheduling work (Hackman & Oldman, 1976). Only in one situation did the lack of freedom, and independence become an explicit feature of a respondent's experience of stress. In this case, the employee had a particularly authoritative manager who would not let her have any responsibility in her job. In fact, the manager

insisted on approving all of the employee's actions. This employee described her manager as her only source of stress. In many cases, respondents suggested that it was more desirable to be part of a team and share the responsibilities of determining work. Respondents suggested that the interdependence of good teamwork was associated with less stress. In contrast, most literature indicates that job autonomy (independence and freedom) is negatively associated with emotional distress and physical symptoms (Spector, 1986). However, job autonomy would seem also to be related to other constructs such as participation in decision making, and authority which may explain its negative association with stress.

Themes of Social Interaction

Many of the themes in the present study seemed to centre around the interaction of people on the job in various positions. Particularly, the nature of social interactions among employees, between employees and managers, and throughout the organization as a whole seem to have a profound effect upon the stress of front-line employees.

One issue that seemed particularly salient in the present study was that of social support. Social support has received increasing attention through its association with the construct of burnout. Recall that the burnout syndrome

is generally associated with three components: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1984a, 1986). Leiter and Maslach (1988) suggested that,

contact with people can be a major source of distress, frustration, or conflict in human service professions, and that such a negative experience can be an important element in an employee's satisfaction with the job and commitment to continue working in it (p. 298).

In the present study, salient issues that impacted upon stress were often associated with interactions with other people in the work setting. These issues often surrounded the metaphor of teamwork and included themes such as, communication, responsibility, authority, participation in decision making, and social interaction. Respondents indicated that when teamwork was good, stress was significantly reduced. Respondents also indicated that good teams were composed of team members who willingly shared responsibilities and picked up where their teammates left off. Moreover, team members covered for one another so that mistakes did not happen.

One of the most important criteria for ensuring that good teamwork happened was communication. Respondents seemed to suggest that communication was important for problem solving, sharing ideas, and support. In order to have good communication, respondents suggested that it had to be open,

in that no information was withheld from team members and team members were always at liberty to express their personal views of issues. Open communication was suggested by respondents to include both personal and work-related problems. Another criterion of good communication was that problems were never addressed by individuals; they were always addressed by the team. This aspect of teamwork seemed important for respondents because it ensured that control and responsibility were distributed equally among team members, and that everyone felt valuable. As an aside, it would seem that at this junction participation in decision making and use of authority can most influence stress through their possible connections with teamwork. Being included in decision making and having compromising, accessible, and supportive managers and supervisors was consistent with good teamwork and was reported to reduce stress.

Many respondents suggested that socializing was important among team members because it allowed staff to get to know each other personally and, therefore, led to better teamwork. One respondent indicated that the most important aspect of good working relationships was a "human connection" between staff. Many respondents thought it was a great benefit for staff to get together at organization-wide social events, but often they remarked that people would rarely attend. Moreover, many of the respondents suggested

that one of the most positive aspects of their job was developing relationships with their clients. It seemed as a whole that respondents felt that good social relationships with their co-employees, manager, and clients were an important component of their stress-reducing experience at ACL.

Consistent with these findings, Leiter (1988) suggested that co-worker interactions can both aggravate and alleviate burnout. According to Leiter (1988), a large number of work-related contacts with co-workers was related to higher feelings of personal accomplishment, but it was also associated with higher emotional exhaustion. It was suggested work-related contact is paradoxical because it is always possible that contact will mean more work demands, for example additional meetings and paperwork, therefore contributing to burnout. However, work-related contact was also a necessary part of receiving recognition for accomplishments at work. Informal contact with co-workers was related to high levels of personal accomplishment and increased job satisfaction. Informal, friendly contact with co-workers was suggested to provide a context for coping with the demands that are part of being a caregiver. However, informal contacts were not found to be significantly related to emotional exhaustion or depersonalization.

In the present study, respondents did not make the

distinction between work-related and informal contacts as Leiter (1988) did. Instead, respondents suggested that it was the nature of the contact that was of importance in determining stress. Particularly, respondents associated positive experiences with situations in which there was good communication and good teamwork. In fact, respondents seemed to suggest that open communication among staff members included information that was both work-related and personal. Again, one respondent suggested that the most important criterion of a good working relationship was that there was a "human connection."

One area that came across repeatedly in the interviews was the use of humour by respondents in their relationships with clients, staff, and managers or supervisors. Respondents felt that humour was important for various reasons including that it prevented people from "taking things to heart," and it made communicating and sharing responsibilities much easier. Very little research has been carried out that relates stress in the workplace to humour, but according to Davis & Kleiner (1989) humour in management can reduce stress and lead to helping employees understand management's concerns.

Political Research and Its Results

Throughout the present research process, a dynamic and interactive view was taken of the research object, stress,

because a constructivist approach allowed the distinction between the subjective and the objective to collapse. However, because of this collapse, research could no longer be considered an impartial process. Some theorists have criticized work psychology for ignoring its socio-political position, and for specifically ignoring its contributions to the regulation of the workforce as a whole by focusing on individuals (Hollway, 1991). When reinforcing the self-attribution of stress as personal problems to be coped with, researchers were criticized and said to be in danger of ignoring structural issues to be contested (Thompson and M^cHugh, 1990). Because the present research paradigm collapsed the distinction between the subjective and the objective, it attempted to incorporate the political nature of research into the research process itself.

The Individual or The Organization

Many issues were addressed during the interviews that were not limited to the individual's experience, but rather were reflective of the structure and policies of the organization. For example, one of the most salient themes was violence in the workplace; however, systemic themes, such as teamwork, management and union relations, organizational philosophies and standards were often also implicated in the staff members' experience of stress. Had the research process been an approach which focused solely

upon personality constructs, environmental stressors, or even some combination of these, many of these politically-laden issues may not have been addressed. Through the collapse of the subjective and objective in the present research process, issues related to stress were not wholly limited to the level of the individual. Let us examine some of the ways in which the present research balanced between the examination of individual and systemic foci in the discussions of stress-related issues.

Individual Focus: Who's Stress is this Anyway?

The present research did target the individual in some specific ways, particularly through the discussion of an employee assistance plan (EAP) and counselling, employee qualities, and matching workers with job settings. However, it can be quickly pointed out that none of these issues took a central role in the research, with the possible exception of discussions surrounding the value of an EAP. Most respondents, management and employees alike, did not believe an EAP was a good idea. Many respondents felt that it was an unnecessary waste of money except in one respect, that of providing counselling services for employees.

Respondents felt that counselling for employees by an outside professional would be helpful. However, there seemed to be some disagreement as to whether or not employees would take advantage of such services. Many respondents felt that

employees would not take advantage of services because of the negative stigma associated with them. Others suggested that if confidentiality was assured, employees would use counselling services, while still others disagreed. Many respondents felt that if counselling services were considered important enough, management could find the funding for them, even during economically difficult times. The discussion of counselling services was the most obvious issue produced from the research results that targeted the individual. However, there seemed to be some scepticism from many respondents regarding its effectiveness. Moreover, it was often brought up during the interviews because of the initial interest in an EAP by the researcher.

Other issues that were discussed having to do with how to remediate stress at ACL included education and relief, both of which were somewhat individually oriented. Education has been criticized by some theorists as individual-focused, for example focusing on workshops that teach individuals how to cope with stress (Murphy, 1988). Marshall and Cooper (1979) suggested that the bulk of stress intervention has focused upon stress management techniques; and these techniques appear to be effective at reducing subjective stress and some psycho-physiological indicators (Murphy, 1988). However, the present discussions of education included other ways in which education could help. For example, by giving seminars on organizational communication

patterns, staff members could alleviate stress and improve communication. Moreover, some respondents felt that education on any topic was beneficial by virtue of increasing communication between staff members, and between staff and management.

With respect to relief, respondents felt that employees who have a chance to get away from a stressful situation, even for a few minutes, experienced much less stress. Although this appears at face value to be an individual-oriented issue, many respondents talked about systemic reasons why staff members were not able to take relief when they needed it. For example, because many staff members often worked alone, they could not take breaks. Moreover, since management was opposed to it, staff members could not take days off because they were feeling over-stressed.

Systemic Focus: What is Our Problem?

For the most part, the issues addressed by the respondents were not focused at an individual level. In many cases, salient stress-related issues targeted the organizational level, such as philosophies, standards, violence in the workplace, and management and employee relations. In other cases, findings addressed the dynamics between people by focusing upon teamwork, communication, and social interaction. Let us now examine some of these issues.

Violence was a very important issue that many

respondents indicated was a great source of stress in their jobs. Respondents spoke of how disturbing it was to be physically attacked at work. Moreover, many respondents suggested that management was not doing anything to support staff members who were working with violent clients. One respondent felt that anyone working with a violent client was setting him/herself up for dismissal because if s/he ever did anything wrong during a client "behaviour", s/he would be fired. Several respondents indicated that the human rights of staff were often subordinated to the rights of clients because of client disabilities. In the case of violent attacks, this was perceived as particularly unfair.

Respondents described contradictions in the philosophy of care at ACL to be a major source of stress. Often conflicts between staff arose because of basic differences in beliefs about what was good for clients. Moreover, staff members were often frustrated if they felt that they could not implement activities or ideas congruent with the philosophy of independent living because of some organizational reason, such as the lack of staffing. Respondents also described being frustrated when they saw policies and standards being applied inconsistently by different people, usually different managers. This frustration came from confusion as to what was expected from employees and a sense of unfairness. This was a particularly important issue for many of the front-line employees because

it was at the hands of a manager that they would be disciplined for a violation of policy. One respondent suggested that employees were ignorant of many of the policies of ACL which consequently led to the inconsistent use of them. Leiter (1991) asserted that one of the major contributors to the development of burnout is the conflict between professional role expectations conflicting and administrative policies. He suggested that contradictions between professional role expectations and policies result from conflicts between individual and organizational control.

Leiter (1991) suggested that much of the burnout literature ignored organizational issues and focused upon self-help approaches to stress management. This happened mainly because it was popular among administrators who had a stake in controlling organizational change. Thus, it can be expected that approaches that focus upon the individual ignore conflicts between the individual and administrative policy. For example, because the transactional approach focuses upon the level of interaction between the person and his/her environment, it can only partially address systemic workplace issues and then only at the level of the individual's relation to them. More often, however, it is at greater risk of focusing too heavily on appraisals and coping styles which again places the responsibility squarely on the shoulders of individual workers.

Management and employee relations were often referred to in the interviews as a source of stress. Respondents suggested that because open communication and participation in decision making was an important influence on the stress of employees, the relationship between management and employees was central to the front-line experience of stress. When employees spoke about support, they often referred to management and their desire to receive more support from them. When upper management was not responsive or didn't listen to front-line employees, it created stress because it was a breakdown in communication. One respondent suggested that one of the biggest sources of stress is organizational problems that employees have to deal with repeatedly because management has done nothing to change them, even after continual complaints. Some respondents suggested that management had a defensive and secretive attitude because they were antagonized by the local union who created an "us against them" attitude that made open communication impossible. Moreover, respondents indicated that the management/employee grievance procedure also did not improve management/employee relations because it led to a win/lose situation.

Lastly, the most salient issues to be addressed by the respondents were the impact that teamwork and communication had upon stress. Both of these issues surround relations between individuals. In fact, positive aspects of teamwork

that seemed to reduce stress involved sharing responsibility and communicating openly. To be recognized in your work and valued by the team as an individual was important, but superordinate to this were the goals of the team, sharing responsibilities, and balancing control and decision making. Thus, respondents seemed to de-emphasize the individual and value an emphasis upon the dynamics of good teamwork and good communication.

Management and Employee/Union Dichotomies

One of the most important influences on stress at ACL was the existence of good teamwork. Moreover, good teamwork was linked to open communication by respondents.

Interestingly, both upper management and union representatives in the present sample suggested that having an "us against them" view of the interactions between particular groups within ACL made communication difficult. One good example of communication problems at ACL, based upon divisions made between groups, included discussion of the alleged "open-door" policy at central office. In short, upper managers believed that they were accessible, easy-to-talk-to, and approachable where front-line employees were concerned. Moreover, these managers suggested that they actively encouraged employees to take advantage of their open-door policy. Employees, for the most part, were in complete disagreement. In fact, several employees suggested

that management had actually discouraged them from speaking out, and often systematically remained deaf to their complaints on several occasions. Some employees suggested that management was secretive about information which led to a breakdown in communication. Employees also accused the upper level management of having an anti-union sentiment. The managers responded to the employees' position by suggesting that many employees either had an anti-management sentiment or did not know that management was open to hearing employee ideas and/or complaints. One manager suggested that upper management was often forced to be secretive about information because of the adversarial position of the employees' union. It is evident throughout this example that the control of information and power differentials between groups had an important impact upon the pattern of communication at ACL, and, therefore, stress.

Much of the discourse surrounding the reduction of stress among front-line employees seemed to include the dissolution of distinct groups within ACL. This dissolution was advocated in two ways, by redistributing responsibility and control over work at ACL and by de-regulating the control of information. For example, by including employees in decision making, employees would have more input over the "things" that could stress them on the job. Moreover, employees could have access to information they may otherwise never would have. Both of these effects would

serve to reduce stress, according to respondents, but they would also have the effect of blurring the distinction between the roles of managers and employees. Specifically, in the present example, because information would be more available to employees and power (in the form of responsibility and control over decision making) would be redistributed, the difference between management and employees would become less distinct.

Assuming that respondents would refer to their team using the pronoun "we", examining the divisions between who was and was not part of one's team at ACL (part of "them") becomes particularly poignant. When considering Hollway's (1991) suggestion that much of the discourse around research in work psychology has had the effect of regulating workers, the manner in which different groups communicate in the workplace is vital because of the connection in the present research between stress and open communication. It is through common historical social practices, the historical social practices of labour and management, that communication patterns at ACL have been influenced. For example, several opposing dichotomous groups were presented as important features of communication at ACL; some of those included upper management and union, upper management and employees, and unit managers and employees. It seemed that any time a dichotomy of this kind was presented by respondents during the interviews, it pointed to an area

where communication was not open, and where power was unequal. According to a Foucauldian poststructuralist view, the historical social practices of labour and management have influenced the discourse surrounding communication between management and employees and, therefore, also have influenced experience of front-line employees and, therefore, their stress. Because open communication and equally distributed responsibility and control were suggested to reduce stress for front-line employees, dichotomies between management and labour, and the discourse surrounding them, not only related to the regulation of individuals in the workplace, as Hollway (1991) suggested, but also related to the regulation of stress in the workplace, as well.

The Viability of a Constructivist Approach to Stress

The results suggested that a constructivist approach to stress and its associated methodology were in some ways consistent with a transactional conceptualization of stress. The transactional approach to stress views stress as dynamic, interactive, and dependent upon its context. The constructivist approach focuses upon similar features with the exception that its methodology seems more consistent with these assumptions. Throughout the research process, the present inquiry focused upon the dynamic and interactive nature of stress. Perhaps the most important aspect of the

constructivist approach was that it allowed for the fluid, dynamic, interactive process of making sense of "stress" to be embodied by the research process itself. The most apparent manifestation of this emphasis was represented in the data collection and analysis in which the meanings of stress were actually constructed by the researcher and the research participants through social interaction in their particular research context.

The present constructivist approach took into account the time-and-place dependent meanings of occupational stress and its methodology. By using naturalistic, unstructured interviews, data collection and analysis focused upon the interactive, dynamic meanings of stress. Many different views were expressed by the respondents that described stress. For example, many respondents emphasized the role of communication patterns in stress; whereas, others identified violence at work as their major source of stress. Yet other respondents encapsulated their stress in people, for example, "My manager is my stress." This respondent described her experience of stress in a way most relevant to her and this description was captured in the research process. Stress was created for her when her manager did not communicate with her, did not include her input in decisions, and did not give her responsibility or control over her job. However, her description of stress was also dependent upon the particular context she was in and subject

to revision as time and/or place changed. As she explained, if she had had a different manager, she would have had no stress. Each respondent described stress according to the most salient aspects of their context. More than this, however, the researcher also defined stress through the questions derived from previous interviews; thus, attempting to construct common themes where none may have existed before.

Making Sense of Stress

The inclusion of multiple and diverse meanings allowed the researcher and the research participants to construe what stress meant to people at ACL in that particular research context. Moreover, constructed meanings and the diversity within them allowed for the further discussion and delimitation of context-specific meanings. For example, some respondents suggested that the most salient issues related to stress surrounded the issue of violence in the workplace; whereas, other respondents suggested that communication patterns were the most salient issues. As the research process progressed, it led to the further delimitations of how communication and violence affected stress in the present context. At the same time, the researcher was able to relate the constructed meanings of stress from the present context to stress theory in a way that may have been of use to researchers and research participants in other

contexts.

Sometimes trying to make sense of stress at ACL led to confusion and paradox. Often, respondents addressed several salient issues simultaneously that framed their experience of stress, sometimes even at different levels. Moreover, they would often contradict themselves. For example, respondents indicated that violent "behaviours" were a major source of stress on the job and suggested that there were no policies in place to help staff cope with violence. Yet, in discussing how policies could affect stress, respondents suggested that too much bureaucracy and too many rules also created stress for them. Because the present methodology embraced multiple, dynamic, and contradictory meanings, it was able to incorporate such diverse and paradoxical meanings into its findings. It was often these diverse and paradoxical meanings that could be of greatest interest to the researcher and the research participants.

Meanings did not always converge and, often, there were paradoxes. For example, a simple explanation of violence at ACL was that there was not a sufficient policy in place for handling violent "behaviours" when there should have been. In other areas, however, perhaps policies were too restrictive. However, such an explanation seems over simplistic. Because ACL existed as an organization accountable to a government regulatory body, it must enforce policies that satisfy government legislation, but this

enforcement also created stress for staff members. In the instance of health and safety regulations, group homes were to conform to certain standards set by the government and were inspected at regular intervals. At the same time ACL adhered to health and safety standards, the agency promoted independence and freedom of choice for its clients. This left staff members in a curious position.

While adhering to policy which was designed to protect the health and safety of clients, staff members were also expected to promote independence and freedom of choice. One respondent talked about a situation in a fast food restaurant where one of her clients became physically violent. While she attempted to protect the health and safety of her client, the other clients, and passersby, policy also mandated that she not physically restrain the client or impinge upon his rights. Because health and safety policy was necessarily constraining by virtue of being regulatory, the staff member was placed in the position where she was made responsible for the client hurting himself and others, but not allowed to restrain him either physically or verbally. Diverse meanings and paradox, however, were often valuable as they were presented. For example, although the paradox seemed unresolvable, through the process of research, it has hopefully become evident to ACL that policies can create paradoxes and stress for staff members. In response, ACL could form a committee composed of

both management and employee representatives to continually review policies for apparent paradoxes that create stress and attempt to resolve them. For example, such a task force could address the paradoxical position of staff members who are working with violent clients and attempt to deal with the difficult issue of balancing between client rights and employee rights. It would also serve the dual purposes of communicating policies to ACL employees and including employees in decision making.

The constructivist approach and its associated methodology were also consistent with the transactional approach by virtue of the emphasis upon dynamic interactions. For instance, the transactional approach takes as its unit of analysis the dynamic relationship between an individual and his/her environment. This approach focuses upon the subjective appraisal of potential stressors and one's ability to cope with those stressors. However, by using a deductive and empirical methodology, other meanings, contradictions, and even other levels of meaning are minimized. For example, the transactional approach has been criticized for largely ignoring systemic and organizational influences upon stress. This minimalization is mainly as a result of the focus upon testing hypotheses associated with the appraisals of stress, and the coping responses of individuals. Even in light of dynamic and interactive appraisals and coping responses, meanings or levels of

meaning beyond this framework are marginalized.

Interaction and Process

The present research approach considered stress to be the product of dynamic interactions. Because the research process is inductive and interactive, the constructivist methodology allows the meanings of stress to be delimited through the negotiation of meaning between the researcher and the respondents and did not restrict multiple meanings, contradictory meanings, or levels of meaning. Salient issues for respondents such as teamwork, management and union relations, conflicts over policy, and communication patterns were addressed during the interviews by the respondents. Had the present methodology strictly focused upon the appraisal of stressors and responses to them, these issues may never have arisen as important features of stress at ACL. By not considering its framework to be fluid, the transactional approach elevates appraisals and coping responses to the choice units of analysis because it assumes a cognitive psychological view of a person and his/her environment, albeit dynamic and interactive. In the present study, all frameworks were considered fluid and subject to revision or replacement, including its own. Thus, multiple meanings, levels of meaning, discourses, and different models of stress could be embraced. Moreover, through the data collection and analysis employed, the examination of stress

became more dynamic and interactive.

Limitations and Future Directions

Limitations:

The end product of this research is a beginning point for another inquiry. As such, several issues need to be addressed in the present research design which will fuel further inquiry. The first issue is the lack of provision in the present study for multiple member checks. Member checks are important for verifying that the information the researcher has collected closely reflects the views of the research participants. Moreover, member checks decentralize the interpretation process such that the researcher is consistently expected to defend his/her research ideas at various regular stages throughout the research process to the research participants. Because of time constraints, no member checks were possible in the present study. However, because the research process was dialectical in that the interviewer attempted to solicit the response of interviewees to other constructions, including his own, a collaborative process of data interpretation was, at least partially, still in place. Moreover, because a coded audit trail was recorded by the researcher, it is possible for other researchers to cross-check the joint construction of the research with the raw data of the present study.

Another issue which is not entirely unrelated to the

first, is the use of a research team to conduct constructivist research. Because constructivist research is based upon the principle of building consensus and multiplicity of meaning, it is important that a wide range of views are represented in the initial stages of the research and have the opportunity to influence the research process throughout. In the present research study, research was carried out by only one individual which increases the risk that interpretation of the results will be the result of one individual's construction of the object of inquiry. The present study was fortunate enough to have in place an ad-hoc committee from ACL and an academic advisory committee that oversaw the research process and its outcomes. The ACL committee was composed of the management and union Co-chairs of the agency's joint health and safety committee, ACL's Operations Director, and the academic advisor of the researcher. The academic advisory committee was composed of the academic advisor of the researcher and two other faculty members from the University of Windsor. All of these individuals were able to comment upon and critique a research proposal posited by the researcher. Moreover, it is the goal of the researcher to have a committee of ACL representatives, including representatives from management and union, comment upon and critique the written results of the project before it is released to the agency as a whole.

Directions:

There are many viable directions that the present research could take. First, further examination of the philosophical consistencies and inconsistencies of the transactional approach and its method are warranted, including, for example, the value of prediction and control in the approach, and the value of focusing upon person-environment interactions through the analysis of appraisals and responses to stress. Moreover, the possibility of a constructivist transaction could be evaluated as a better research tool for transactional theorists.

Second, because the present methodology incorporates socio-political issues, these issues should be further explored with respect to their influence on the research process. The present study evaluated research with respect to how focusing upon the individual could serve to regulate the workforce. However, many other areas could be examined, for example, the ways in which funding can affect the outcomes of stress research, the further exploration of the impact of management and employee relations on stress, and the examination of the tension between professional role expectation and administrative policy control in social service agencies. In addition, the financial forces influencing research in stress should be examined. For example, absenteeism, health compensation payments, and loss of productivity are driving forces behind much occupational

stress research because of the costs to business. These costs are estimated to be \$150 billion annually in the U.S.A (Freudenheim, 1987). It is for this reason that employee health has become the focus of a great deal of research attention. Through its association with physical illness and job strain (negative stress outcomes at work), occupational stress has rocketed to the forefront of organizational research. Moreover, the politics of this kind of research are evident. For example, Millar (1992) suggests that one of the most critical questions for organizational researchers to answer with respect to employee health is the extent to which stress is a result of conditions of the workplace or factors outside the workplace. The reason that such a question is important lies within the varying concerns surrounding workers' compensation claims for stress (Millar, 1992).

Lastly, the present research study could provide a starting point for examining the relationship between the democratization of the workplace and worker health including the examination of issues such as control, participation in decision making, autonomy, and responsibility. Such an examination should take into account such issues as the regulation of information by, and the distribution of responsibility and control between different groups in organizations.

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FOOTNOTES

1. The word "client" will be used to refer to the program participants since most of the research participants used this word to refer to the developmentally challenged people with whom they worked. The author recognizes the problematic political nature of this word, but employs it for the sake of consistency and clarity.
2. It is difficult to conceptualize the data analysis resulting in a "construction;" it may be more accurate to describe the whole data analysis as a process of construing. The "construction" referred to in the methodology were computer-generated categories of propositions from the interviews which changed with each successive interview.
3. The advantage of decentralizing the interpretation of units, categories, and constructions becomes evident here. Anywhere interpretation is centred in one or a few individuals, such as the researcher, the research findings are more at risk of becoming the product of those who have the legitimated right to interpret the findings. Particularly, the "appropriate" interpretation of the data becomes the interpretation of those who are in positions powerful enough to say it is.
4. Please keep in mind as you read that the salient findings from this study are limited to the context in which the data were collected and the individual participants from which they were collected. Moreover, salient findings from the data address a specific limited time period and were framed in part by specific questions derived from the contracting phase of this research. Keeping these considerations in mind is important when you make generalizations about the findings that you read in this section.
5. See Section entitled An Association for Community Living for explication of the philosophy of independent/community living contained in ACL's mission statement.

APPENDIX A

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

AGE: _____

SEX: _____

JOB STATUS: _____ (FULL-TIME, PART-TIME,
SUBSTITUTE)JOB TITLE: _____
(This question will be used to identify you with a larger
category e.g. Program Coordinator, Residential Counsellor,
Vocational Counsellor)

NUMBER OF YEARS AND MONTHS AT ACL: _____

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND: _____

(FOR EXAMPLE: DEGREE, CERTIFICATE, PROFESSIONAL WORKSHOPS)

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Opening Discourse

Participants will be asked to describe there jobs and their experience at ACL. The opening dialogue is meant to set the participants at ease with the interviewer and allow the participant to begin to frame their experiences at ACL.

e.g.) I'd like you to describe your job here at ACL.

Possible Probes:

Tell me about the program participants you work with.
Can you describe your work setting?
Can you describe the activities you're usually involved in at work?
What are your co-employees like and what is their relationship to you?
What do you think of ACL and its efforts to achieve community living for program participants?

2. Job Demands

Participants will be asked to describe how they find their jobs demanding.

eg.) Do you find your job challenging?

Possible Probes:

What do you enjoy about your job?
Describe the positive aspects of your job?
Describe the negative aspects of your job?
In what ways is your job challenging?
How does it make you feel to go to work everyday?
Do you feel like you want to come to work?

3. "Causes" of Stress

Participants will be asked to discuss what specific things about their job that cause it to be challenging.

eg.) Tell me what you think makes your job challenging.

Possible Probes:

Can you describe things that can make your job tough?
 Are there aspects of your job you find demanding?
 What are they?
 Are there things at work that push you to your limits? What are they?
 Do some things at work really test you? Describe them.
 Why do you think some things challenge you and other things do not?

4. Response to Stress

Participants will be asked to discuss how they respond to/cope with the demands of their jobs

eg.) Tell me how you respond when your job gets challenging.

Possible Probes:

What do you do when things get challenging at work?
 In what ways do you cope with challenges?
 What do you find helps when work becomes demanding?
 What do you feel like doing when things get tough at work?
 Describe things that happen to you when your job gets demanding?
 How do you get through the demands of your job?
 What could make your job less stressful?

5. Personal Theory

Participants will be asked to describe why they think front-line human service employees may experience stress. They will be asked to construct a theory of occupational stress.

eg.) Why do you think human service employees experience occupational stress?

Possible Probes:

What do you think causes stress at work?
 How do you think people successfully deal with stress?

What are some things on the job that can reduce stress?
 What are some things on the job that can increase stress?
 Where do you think stress comes from?
 What do you think happens to people who experience stress?

6. Context of Stress

Participants will be asked to describe how their job is made challenging by being an employee of ACL and how that experience is the same or different from other social service agencies.

eg.) How are the challenges you experience at work unique to working at ACL?

Possible Probes:

How does the particular location within ACL you work at affect your stress?
 Are there unique things about ACL that make working here more or less stressful?
 How does working at ACL compare to other social service jobs you've had? What is the difference?
 What are some of the possible differences you've noticed in stress between institutional workers and community workers?

7. Employee Assistance Plan

Participants will be asked to discuss how they think that an EAP might help employees who found their jobs highly demanding and were having difficulty coping.

Describe an EAP. " An employee assistance plan is a policy which an organization offers to help its employees. It can consist of things such as employee benefits, addiction education and counselling, psychotherapy, lay-off counselling, workshops on various important topics etc."

eg.) Do you think an EAP is a good idea for helping employees deal with the challenges of the job?

Possible Probes:

Tell me how an EAP might help employees who are

having difficulty coping with the demands of their jobs.

What other ways do you think ACL might be able to help employees who are having difficulty coping with their jobs?

What things might an EAP do to help people experiencing stress?

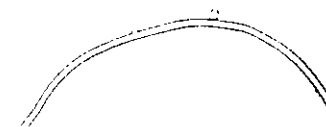
What proportion of an EAP do you think should be devoted to dealing with stress?

What kinds of things would you put in an EAP?

8. Conclusion

Are there any other issues that we haven't talked about that you would consider central to occupational stress at ACL?

Can you name a few other people at ACL that might have a view of occupational stress that is opposite to yours?



APPENDIX B

Constructing

Because data collection in the present research process was based upon dynamic interplays between individuals and meaning in the research context, it is very difficult to give a discrete example of a construction. In fact, delimiting the joint ongoing construction of the research object is one of the most difficult tasks of the investigator and the result of which is the findings section in present study. It is perhaps more useful to examine the way in which research questions changed as successive interviews were carried out and how the answers to these questions drove the process of data collection.

In particular, let us examine the process of interviewing that led from C_1 to C_2 . It should be recalled that the first research interview was conducted with a management representative of the central Health and Safety Committee. In nominating a divergent view from her own, this respondent nominated a union representative for the second interview. The researcher began the interview process using the interview protocol presented in Appendix A; however, questioning began to diverge from this protocol even within the first interview. Let us now attempt to frame the process that led to C_2 . Please be advised that the following is not an entire summary of interview #1 and interview #2. It is meant to be an example of how the dynamic of questioning and answering between the interviewer and interviewees led to C_2 , particularly surrounding the topic of management and employee relations, and their impact on stress.

Partial Summary and Transcript of Interview#1

Following the interview protocol during the first interview, the respondent was asked to elaborate upon her personal view of stress at ACL. What in essence was her theory as to why stress exists as it did at ACL?

Int: Ok, let's go for something a little bigger. I wonder if you could briefly encapsulate what we've been talking about. Describe it in terms of some sort of theory that you have...or that you feel...how stress is working here.

Resp: How stress is working here?

Int: Yah, do you have a theory about it?

Resp: No, I think it's...over the last couple of years it's been relieved somewhat for front-line staff. Now, I might be misunderstanding that because I'm not front-line, but I think

there's a lot of good support so I'm hoping it's relieved them.

Int: How do you think that's the case?

Resp: Because there's such an open-door policy that anybody could come in and see anybody up here at any time [at the central office]. Yah, or that we go out there and that I think they should understand by now that they're not alone in it.

Int: Do you think the employees know that?

Resp: I think the majority of them do. Uhm, I would say there's two sides to the union. There's some that are saying "anti-management"...no matter what. No matter what, they're not going to support managers. Uh, and the other people that do not distinguish between union and non-union...

Int: Well, just to back track then. I was talking about whether employees felt comfortable coming here to talk to the people at the central office about issues. Uh, then we were talking about a theory of stress. Now, you sort of talked about a split between management and union...uhm, that's...is that a critical issue as far as stress?

Resp: I think it's been relieved a lot. Yah, it's been a relief since the program coordinator came in too.

Int: And that means what? That stress is...

Resp: I don't think employees have as much stress...I would hope to think they don't have quite as much because they know they can call you (the manager). They know they can count on somebody else as part of the team. They're not ultimately responsible. That there's not something going to go on their file on them. Compared to six years ago, it would have gone on the file. There would have been employees reprimanded for different things.

Int: So, there is a sense of increased cooperation? Between management and ...

Resp: Employees. Yah.
...

Int: So, do you see that, I guess, in terms of talking about a theory of stress then, would you see that as being an overarching issue then when you talk about...uhm...getting rid of stress or reducing it. The idea that there's an open-door policy.

Resp: Yah, I think it reduces it.

From this excerpt, it can be seen that the process of questioning moved away from a "theory" of stress to a discussion regarding the "increased" support that front-line staff members were receiving from management. During this interview, the respondent also focused upon the relationship between management and union. Particularly, she focused upon how union attitudes sometimes led to a division between management and employees. In trying to sum up the kind of support that management gave to employees, she suggested that there was an open-door policy at central office whereby employees could walk into any managers door and present their ideas easily. This open-door policy led to a better relationship between management and employees and, thus, reduced stress. In addition, the first threads of the teamwork metaphor can be seen weaving their way the dialogue.

Note: The partial summary of interview^{#1} is ostensibly the same as the partial C₁ since only one respondent has been interviewed at this point in the data collection.

Partial Summary and Transcript of Interview^{#2}

During the second interview, the respondent was asked to comment on other agencies in comparison to ACL in order to establish some sense of what the context of ACL was like with respect to stress. The respondent began to speak about another agency which she thought was better than ACL and why it was. During this description, she suggested that communication and teamwork were the most important criteria for creating a harmonious work setting.

Int: It's interesting that you should describe that. Now, why as an agency on the whole might they have a healthier attitude?...is it [teamwork], for example, related to their philosophy? Is it mandated through the employee selection process?

Resp:

Well, knowing that their employees...It just seems to be a happier workplace to me because, and again I'm an outsider looking in, but the discussions I've had with their union and ours, they don't have nearly the bull-shit issues we have. They don't have the inconsistencies we have. They have a lot more harmony as far as staff and managers. They have their pissing matches too, I recognize that, but it's just not the petty stuff. It's not the unfair practices. It's not the things like that...Communication. Their communication is extremely good. We had a thing recently where we all went down to Toronto for this protest....well, they were giving me the information and their E.D. (Executive Director) was saying, "Do you know if [name of respondent] has this yet?" and stuff like that. Through [name of other agency], regarding the protest preparation for blah, blah, blah...I had paper work this high (indicates pile). From our management, I got one piece of paper that was sent to all of our employees...No communication...and theirs is...they just...they don't hide stuff. They don't say, "This part's your business, but not this part. No, don't ask us about that [be]cause it doesn't concern you."... I do respect that there [are] private issues and I respect administration as far as personnel and shit like that. That isn't our business..(the union), nor am I interested in getting my feet in there. But, when it comes to issues like a protest where you (the management) want the union to give you money for a bus, you want union [members] to show up there and absorb the time off themselves or use a vacation day,... you must communicate. You must tell us what...your goal [is], what...you [are] going after, what...we [can] do together to get the favourable response that we want from the government... You have to do that. You can't hand me a paper and say, "Oh, by the way we want...two grand from the union for a bus,"...If it wasn't for [name of other agency], I wouldn't have had any information and...[I got the information only] because their manager...soon as they got anything on it,...[gave it to their Union President and then to me]. That to me is teamwork. That's what creates the pleasant work area. That's

what takes away a lot of stress on the job. That's what makes people glad they have the job they have, not for the money, but because they enjoy the job...

...

At this point in the interview, the respondent is asked to comment upon some of the themes derived from previous interviews. In particular, the suggestion that there is an open-door policy at central office whereby employees can feel free to communicate with management at central office.

Int: ... Uhm, ok, first of all, communication has been targeted as a very important issue. Uhm, there's this idea of an open-door policy at central office...There is a feeling...that employees can come there any time they want and...there's a feeling that people at central office actively...encourage this kind of thing. Do you think that that's the case?

Resp: I absolutely disagree with that...I don't see that as [the way] it is. I think that [it's like] (imitating management), "Yah, you [the staff member] can come...in and we [the management] will sit there and smile, and listen to you for an hour, but what do you mean you want us to do something? Yah, we'll get back to you." I think that happens a lot... That's reality. But, I think that kind of system is the way it is... And my opinion is if there wasn't a problem [communicating], if there [were not] issues, you [wouldn't] need a union [to advocate for staff members]...

Later during the interview, the respondent is asked to summarize what she thinks are the central elements of stress at ACL. During her summary, the developing themes of communication and teamwork are evident.

...

Int: I'm just going to wrap it up then here. Uhm, first of all are there any issues that you think that we've missed that might be important for this issue (stress)?

Resp: Uhm, no. I think that the bottom line is... communication...recognizing that everybody has a job to do and we're all there for the

same reason...There has to be some harmony and some teamwork put into place...that's so important...Unless we're (ACL) willing to do that, we're never going to accomplish our goals...We have to quit sitting in the corner hoarding our marbles and saying, "These are my marbles, don't touch them."...Until we lose that and until we act as the humanitarian outfit we're supposed to be, we're never going to achieve [those goals]...

Partial Construction#2

From the first two interviews, a category was delineated by the researcher which contained "units" from both interviews. That category was given the label, "management/union relations." At this point, the category is still quite ambiguous, containing elements of teamwork and communication which would later develop more clearly into categories of their own. For example:

Management/Employee Relations

Category Description:

- describes how relations between management and employees affect stress.
- describes nature of communication between management and employees.
- describes how relationship between management and union affects stress.

I1.CO.M.I6.C¹

Respondent believes that an open-door policy at central office reduces stress.

I1.CO.M.15.C

Respondent believes that increased cooperation between management and union has reduced stress at ACL.

I1.CO.M.15.A

Respondent believes that an open-door policy at central office provided employees with support.

I2.RH.RS.22.C

Respondent disagrees that there is an open door policy at central office.

I2.RH.RS.22.G

Respondent feels that management patronizes employees when they are listening to issues these employees have brought

¹ Code which connects unit back to individual interview transcript.

forth.

I2.RH.RS.19.D

Respondent suggests that management tries to keep issues secretive and does not promote open communication.

I2.RH.RS.20.A

Respondent believes that good communication leads to good teamwork which reduces stress.

As the interviews progressed, the arrangement of these categories changed as units were moved and split according to category descriptions. Thus, categories became more clearly delineated as data collection progressed. With the addition of each interview, the collection of categories and their relation to one another essentially represented the forming "construction" of the research process.

Possible Probes for Third Interview

Questions that were asked in the third interview included those that attempted to further delineate the categories, for example, further consolidate a communication category:

What kind of communication reduces stress?

How does the relationship between management and union impact stress?

What is good and bad communication?

APPENDIX C

REVISED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL²1. Opening Discourse

Used the same probes as original interview protocol.

2. Job Demands

Used the same probes as original interview protocol.

3. Communication

How important do you think communication is for stress?

Other respondents have said:

- a) There should be more communication between managers because stress among managers percolates down to employees.
- b) There is a defensive relationship between management and union that bars communication at ACL.
- c) ACL employees gossip a lot.
- d) Good communication reduces stress.
- e) Withholding information does not aid in good communication.
- f) There is an open-door policy at central office.
- g) There needs to be good communication between management and staff.

4. Teamwork

Is teamwork important for the impact of stress on employees?
How?

Other respondents have said:

- a) Teamwork is a great avenue for problem solving.

² The revised interview protocol was presented for the first time during the fifth interview after being derived from categories created from the first four interviews. Moreover, successive interviews also served to redirect the interview protocol as data collection progressed.

- b) Team members share problems, personal or work-related.
- c) Team members need to be able to ask for help.

5. Authority

Do you think authority plays a role in stress? How?

Other respondents have said:

- a) It depends upon whether or not the person in authority remembers that his/her staff members are human.

6. Standards

Do you think inconsistency in standards and discipline have a role to play in stress? How?

Other respondents have said:

- a) ACL is inconsistent in the application of its standards and, therefore, discipline can be unfair.

7. Philosophy

Do you think a discrepancy between one's ideal of independent/community living and the daily activities of one's job leads to stress? How?

Other respondents have said:

- a) The philosophy of ACL is, in reality, more of one of best possible care, rather than independent living.
- b) ACL values public image of the organization over its goal of independent/community living?
- c) Some staff members get frustrated when their personal codes of conduct clash with the clients, management, or policy statements.

8. Education

Do you think education about stress is important? How do you think that it works?

Other respondents have said:

- a) ACL should have mandatory seminars.
- b) ACL cannot afford seminars.

- c) Education might be better handled through unit meetings.
- d) Seminars do not really work because employees only go there to take a break from work.

9. Unhealthy Lifestyles

Do you think people respond to stress ACL by eating, smoking, and drinking too much? Why?

Other respondents have said:

- a) Many employees respond unhealthily to stress.
- b) There is not much ACL can do for unhealthy employees.
- c) Employees could be encouraged to live more healthily.

10. Humour

Do you think humour is important in dealing with stress? How?

Other respondents have said:

- a) Many employees are too serious because they focus upon trying to be professional.
- b) Many clients are resentful of staff members and family, and humour is a good tool stave off that resentment.
- c) Staff members and clients need to have fun times together.

11. Maturity

Do you think that many staff are immature at work? Why?

Other respondents have said:

- a) Staff members seem to argue over very petty issues.
- b) Staff members are petty because they lack self confidence.
- c) Some staff members are not equipped to make good and quick decision on the job.

12. Other Areas to Address, if Time Allows

- a) Violence in the Workplace
- b) Support and Recognition from Management
- c) Repeated Occurrences of Problems
- d) Importance of Social Events

APPENDIX D

RESEARCH INFORMATION FORM

Your participation is requested in a study on occupational stress coordinated by Prof. Kathryn Lafreniere of the University of Windsor, Dept. of Psychology and her graduate assistant Dennis Robinson. The general purpose of the study is to examine with the help of front-line insight the traditional conceptions of burnout, occupational stressors, and daily hassles and their influence on human service employees.

You will be asked to participate in an interview in which the interviewer, Dennis Robinson, will want you to discuss your experiences with respect to your job at ACL. You will also be asked to present some of your ideas about the demands of the workplace and your response to them.

Your participation is strictly voluntary and any decision not to participate will not affect your employment with ACL negatively. If you do choose to participate in this investigation and decide not to continue you are free to drop out of the study at any time. The interview is not expected to require more than one hour on one occasion. However, the researcher may wish to verify some of the interview with you at a later date which may or may not require a short meeting or telephone call. Interviews will be held at a time and place convenient for you. Also, the interview will be tape recorded for the convenience of the researcher. Anything that you say in the interview will not be associated with your name in any way. Data collected in the study will be handled only by Dennis Robinson and only aggregated data or summaries of themes will be made available in any research reports to ACL. It may be necessary within a summary or analysis to use a quote from the interview as an example; however, this will in no way be associated with your name. No records or data about you other than the interview will be utilized in the study.

A final summary of the results of this study will be made available to the executive director of your agency and union representatives. Other copies will be available upon request from Dennis Robinson, University of Windsor, Dept. of Psychology. You are welcome to contact the researchers at any time if you require further information or clarification:

Dennis Robinson
Graduate Assistant
Dept. of Psychology
University of Windsor
(519)253-4232

Prof. Kathryn Lafreniere
Dept. of Psychology
University of Windsor
(519)253-4232 ext. 2233

The present study has been cleared by the Ethics Committee,
University of Windsor. Any comments can be directed to:

Office of Research Services
University of Windsor
(519) 253-4232 ext. 3916

I have read the information above and I understand my rights
as a research participant according to the ethical
guidelines employed by the University of Windsor.

Signed_____

Date_____

VITA AUCTORIS

Dennis S. Robinson

1967: Born, Virgo

1990: B.A. (Hons. Psychology), University of Western
Ontario

1993: M.A. (Applied Social Psychology), University of
Windsor

1993: Continuing Studies at University of Windsor
leading to Ph.D. in Applied Social Psychology